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PROG

READERS' POLL RESULTS
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FUTURE
PROG 147

+

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TREVOR HORN
CALIGULA'S HORSE
BRIAN AUGER
PALLAS
NO-MAN

"I've tried to make a film for the ear..."

STEVE HACKETT

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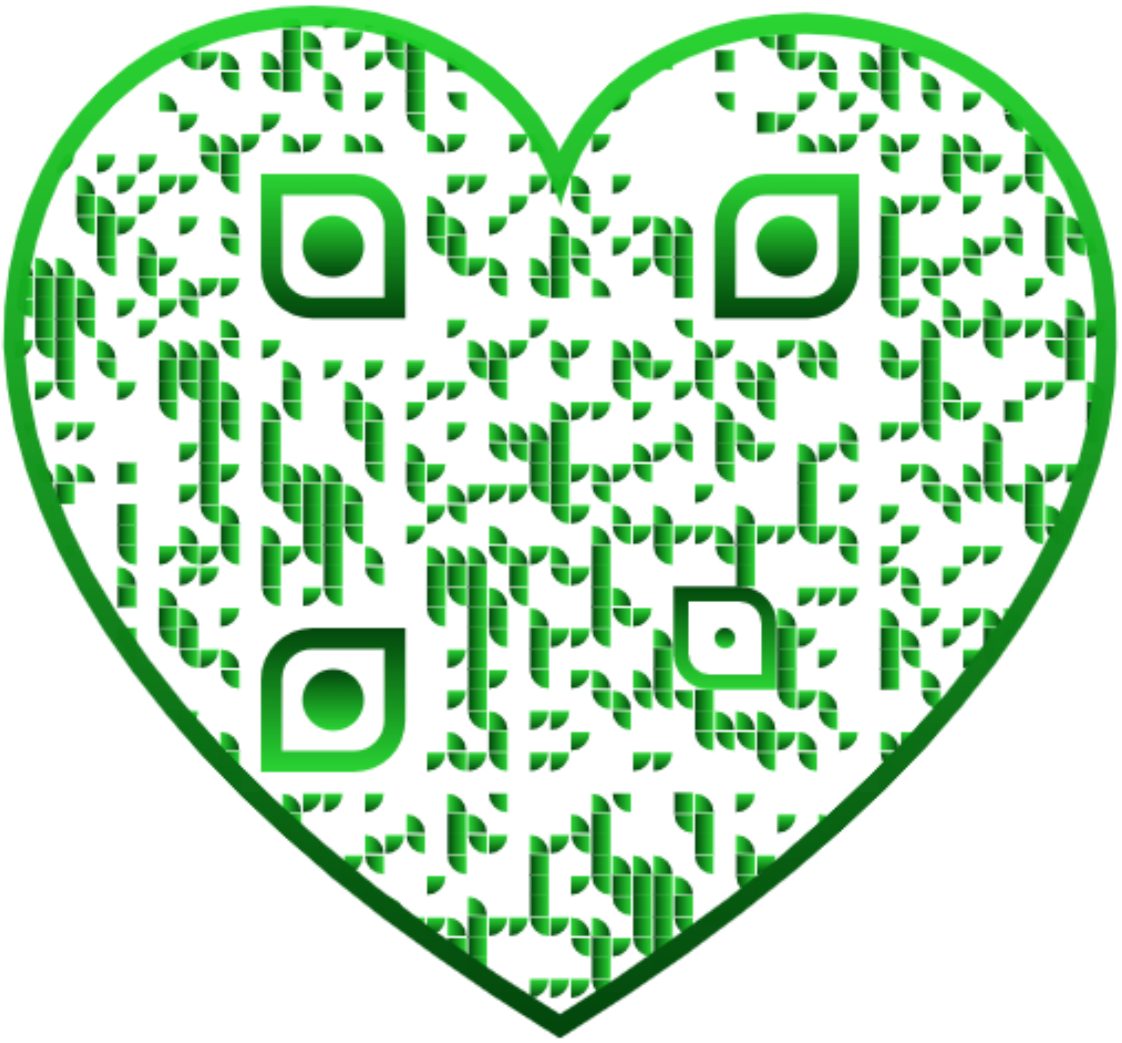

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ISSUE 147 02.02.24

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> There's a lot of stuff, both personal and professional, embedded in the story.

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Steve Hackett

The Circus and the Nightwhale

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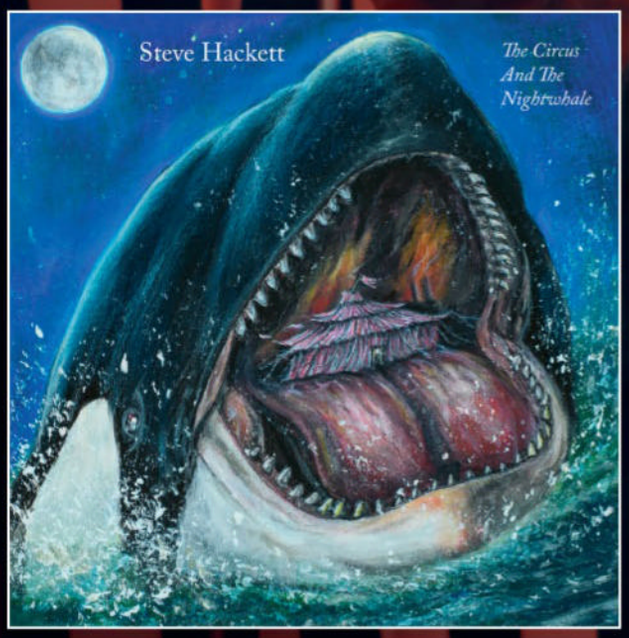
The legendary guitarist celebrates over 50 years of making music with a brand new conceptual studio album.



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The label continues to develop young artists like Pom Poko and Penelope Isles while continuing to build with veterans like BC Camplight and Destroyer.

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1 Warmduscher
8 Minute Machines
Taken from *At The Hotspot*

2 Psychic Markers
Baby It's Time
Taken from *Psychic Markers*

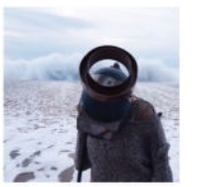
3 Will Stratton
Tokens
Taken from *The Changing Wilderness*

4 Marissa Nadler
Bessie, Did You Make It?
Taken from *The Path Of The Clouds*

5 Penelope Isles
Sudoku
Taken from *Which Way To Happy*

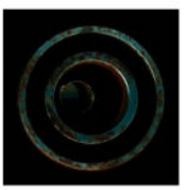
6 The Flaming Lips
Mother I've Taken LSD
Taken from *American Head*

7 Mercury Rev
The Queen Of Swans
Taken from *The Light In You*



8 Mammút
Salt
Taken from *Salt (single)*

9 Landshapes
Ader
Taken from *Heyoon*



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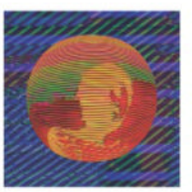
15 Lost Horizons
Every Beat That Passed
Taken from *In Quiet Moments*



16 Icebeing
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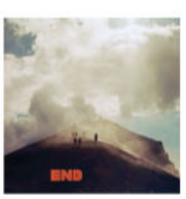
Masque
Taken from *Island Of Noise*

18 AA Williams
Without You I'm Nothing
Taken from *Without You I'm Nothing* (single)



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Taken from *End*

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Taken from Albion

21 Plantoid
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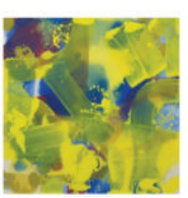

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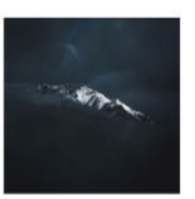

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Taken from *Polish The Machine*

Ed's Letter

Spotify

Stream the Prog 147 playlist at www.spoti.fi/480hdnv

Hello and welcome to the latest issue of *Prog*, our first for 2024. A new Steve Hackett album is always something to be savoured, but when it carries the added thrill of being his first concept album proper since his 1975 solo debut, *Voyage Of The Acolyte*, then that's something to really get excited about. James McNair discusses the inspiration behind *The Circus And The Nightwhale* with Steve on p36 and also the making of that classic debut album on p42 for good measure. When Mike Barnes says in his review of the new album on p90 that it's "Hackett's finest solo album to date" then it truly is exciting times.

Equally exciting are the results of the 2023 Readers' Poll on p28. As I say in the introduction to the poll, *Prog* will be 15 years old next issue, and to see where we are in contrast to those early issues of 2009, both as a magazine and musically, is quite something to behold.

Elsewhere in this issue, Brian Auger looks back on a fascinating career, Steven Wilson and Tim Bowness cast their minds back to the early days of No-Man, Mikael Åkerfeldt discusses the making of the "Mellotron-soaked" *Damnation,* and Family tell us the story of their *Bandstand* album. Meanwhile Trevor Horn, Pallas, Youth, Caligula's Horse, Jo Quail, Pattern-Seeking Animals and more discuss recent releases.

The art-rock label Bella Union provide this issue's free downloadable sampler, please do check it out. They have some great prog-adjacent artists that we suspect many of you will enjoy from AA Williams, Silver Moth, Lanterns On the Lake, Harp, Mercury Rev, Emma Tricca, Explosions In The Sky... The list goes on.

So welcome to 2024. We're back on March 8, when we celebrate our 15th birthday. Until then, stay safe, and as ever, prog on...

Jerry Ewing – Editor

NEXT ISSUE MAR 08 ON SALE

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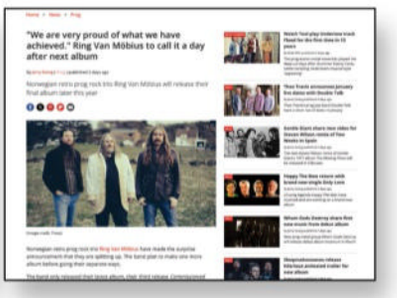

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MAR - SUNDAY 10 LOS ENDOS (GENESIS)	APR - FRIDAY 26 CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIEW	OCT - SUNDAY 27 THE EMERALD DAWN
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Bloody Well Write

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TALES FROM THE REVIVAL

I must congratulate you on your most enjoyable feature celebrating 80s prog in *Prog* 146. A smashing cover, too, and one I'd love to see on a postcard or A4 print.

I was one of those impressionable prog fans who spent their (slightly!) younger years and hard-earned cash hanging out at the Marquee watching the likes of Marillion, Pallas, Pendragon, et al. Dave Everley's excellent piece took me right back to my youth and I spent a very happy weekend digging out my old ticket stubs and listening to your 80s Prog Rival Primer playlist while reminiscing about the era where I had more hair! Ah, those were the days!

Roger Marksford, via email

DISCOVERING THE PAST

The 80s prog revival piece [in *Prog* 146] is superb and has finally encouraged me to investigate more of those bands that were part of the scene. Thoroughly enjoying what I'm hearing by Twelfth Night.

Anyway, in recent years I've picked up a couple of books that have collected heavy metal fanzines into one volume. Naturally I was intrigued as to whether you had considered this for your efforts?

Julian Tipton, via email

Interesting idea, Julian and, to be honest, I hadn't thought about it. I'd also need to find where my copies are and I'm not certain I even have a full set. Definitely worth looking into, though. — Ed.

PLAY IT AGAIN!

I was initially saddened that we would no longer receive a physical CD of music with each issue. After some time now with the digital downloads I must say I am impressed and on board. The digital download provides a greater variety and amount of music, so we get a better look at the variety available from a label or artist. And the digital format allows me to play right away.

In short, thank you for bringing music (and me) further into the modern world.

Barry Hicks, via email

We're so pleased to read that you've been enjoying our samplers, Barry. Now turn to p7 for this month's selection — Dep. Ed.

WHAT'S IN A BOX?

First, appreciation to Stephen Lambe for his excellent recounting of the reconfiguring of Yes in the 'orrible 80s with the coming together resulting in the *90125* era [*Prog* 145]. As with any good music writing, it made me almost want to put the album on. I say "almost" because, as I sat down to write this, Steve Howe's *Motif Volume 2* arrived on my porch, and, so…

***Prog* 146: one of our most popular issues to date.**

A trip down memory lane: Twelfth Night at the Marquee.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TWELFTH NIGHT ARCHIVES/MARK HUGHES

***Prog* 145's cover feature on Yes.**

Second, I would like to make a suggestion for your reviewers of retrospective box sets, and only because it is in the current issue, I will here pick on Daryl Easlea's well-written but not informative enough review of the latest boxing of *The Yes Album*. He basically gives us an in-depth history lesson of where Yes were at at the time of its recording. Any prog fan who is unaware of this information has some real catching up to do, and while I enjoy these little capsules of *Time (And A Word)*, what I need to know before I shell out another hundo is: what am I getting this time that I don't already own? Since lists are always boring, here is mine.

Of *The Yes Album*, I own: the original vinyl, the original Atlantic CD, the Joe Gastwirt remaster, the Rhino Records remaster, and the Steven Wilson Blu-ray deluxe set (and even more different copies of *Fragile*, *CTTE*, *Tales…* and *Relayer*). What I need from the review of the latest incarnation of what I may well already own is: what exactly am

LETTER

I don't normally agree with your Critics' Choice lists, but your writers got it spot-on [in *Prog* 146]. I have been a Steven Wilson fan for many years, but his latest work, *The Harmony Codex* is pure genius. With each repeat listen, it reveals new sonic treasures and the production work is second-to-none, as you might expect.

I would have been seriously disappointed in *Prog* if it hadn't made at least the top three in your list. But there it was at number one! That and Peter Gabriel's *i/o,* which your writers also scored highly, are definitely two of my favourite albums from 2023.

Pete Bossick, Lincoln

Thanks for your email, Pete. Now turn to p28 to find out how both fared in our annual readers' poll! — Dep. Ed.

This issue's star letter wins a goodie bag from burningshed.com *Contents may vary*

I getting with this latest release? Please review printed material, titles and sound quality, and especially include info on what is and what isn't included here that may already be owned in all the other definitive editions of the prog music we are re-(re-re-re!) buying. Mr Easlea only gives us one-half paragraph where he lists the different mixes but doesn't comment on the details sound- or rarity-wise, and also briefly informs us of the included 1971 live recordings (do they sound better than the bootleg many of us already have of this show?), and that's about it.

Again, this is not to pick on Mr Easlea, but only to use his brief Yes history lesson passing as a review to illustrate what I feel would be helpful in our consideration of these repeated releases that we prog nutz feel compelled to drop our limited cash on.

Bruce Hughes, Minneapolis, MN, USA

RICH AND VIBRANT SOUNDS

I have to take issue with Nik Bruckner's missive in *Prog* 146, complaining about *Prog* featuring the "same old artists".

The Fierce & The Dead: modern, vibrant and very progressive.

First, it's both insulting and frankly stupid to say that older artists can't inspire younger people. Young musicians can be inspired by punk, Black Sabbath, Beethoven and John Lee Hooker. The day we can only be inspired by music from the past three years or only played by young musicians is the day music dies.

But there's another issue: *Prog* is the *only* place where you can read about King Crimson, Yes, ELP, Van der Graaf *and* also The Fierce & The Dead, TesseracT and Haken. I can read about bands I've loved for many years, and discover new music that is not covered by the mass media.

So, please ignore Nik and keep on doing what you are doing: writing about prog music in a critical but not sneering fashion, celebrating the old and introducing the new! I think you get the balance right, so keep on promoting the *whole* genre, including its rich and vibrant history.

I buy every issue and never feel my money is wasted. Thank you!

Michael Hatfield, via email

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INTRO

IF IT'S OUT THERE, IT'S IN HERE

JANE WEAVER GOES "HEAVY MELLOW" ON HER LATEST ALBUM

With a major 17-date tour to follow, the contemporary psychedelicist moves into a new direction on her forthcoming LP with the help of celebrated producer John Parish.

Jane Weaver is set to return with her brand-new album, *Love In Constant Spectacle*, which is out on April 5 via Fire Records. Produced by John Parish – arguably best known for his production work with PJ Harvey, folk-proggers This Is The Kit and singer-songwriter Aldous Harding – the full-length release also marks the first time that she's worked with a producer outside of her immediate creative circle.

"I've always wanted to work with John," admits Weaver, "but I got in touch with him accidentally saying, 'I want to do a new album and get outside of Manchester and what's Bristol like to work in? I'd jump at the chance to work with you.' And he said, 'Well, actually, I've got a bit of a gap between now and when I start working with PJ Harvey.' So that's what we did. It was sort of like, 'Right, let's do this thing!' It was like flying by the seat of your pants. So that's what happened."

Weaver says that the decision to work with Parish was largely based on her desire to move into new sonic territories that might not have otherwise been explored, as well as wanting to surrender some of the creative input and judgments to more informed and objective ears.

"I wanted somebody else to make some of the decisions," she reveals, "because when you're producing something in the studio, you're essentially making all the decisions; maybe not all the technical ones, but certainly all the way things sound from beginning to end and how it sounds when you deliver it. It was really good having a different person saying, 'I actually think it would sound better if it was like this.'"

She continues, "For the title track, I didn't like the bass line and said we need to do something on the synth, and then he actually played something on the ARP, and I was like, 'Oh, my God! That sounds much better. It sounds how it should!' It's things like that when you're trying to get somewhere and somebody else needs to make an experienced decision."

Weaver also claims that Parish's decision to record *Love In Constant Spectacle* for two weeks

Jane Weaver: moving forward with a little help from her friends.

"I just wanted to do something that was a bit more emotional and sensitive."

at the celebrated Rockfield Studios near Monmouth in the Wye Valley before moving to Bristol's Invada Studios helped her stand on the shoulders of some of her favourite giants to bring out the best in her.

"It's all about Dave Brock and Hawkwind!" she laughs as she recalls the Welsh studio. "It's a very accessible and down-to-earth place and it's very comfortable. It's not intimidating. It was really cool and easy to work there."

The resulting album finds Weaver playing more guitar than recently to create music that she describes as "heavy mellow" while bringing down the pace in contrast to the more exuberant predecessor *Flock*.

"I just wanted to do something different that was just a bit more emotional and sensitive," she says.

In addition to releasing *Love In Constant Spectacle*, Jane Weaver will also tour England, Scotland, the Republic Of Ireland and Northern Ireland in April and May.

She plays Leeds Brudenell Social Club (April 18), Bristol Trinity Centre (19), Liverpool Arts Club (20), Birmingham Castle & Falcon (21), Glasgow Oran Mor (23), Gateshead The Glasshouse (24), Manchester Band On The Wall (26), Nottingham Rescue Rooms (28), Cambridge Junction (29), Portsmouth Wedgewood Rooms (30), Brighton Concorde 2 (May 1), London Scala (2), Dublin Whelan's (9), Galway Róisín Dubh (10), Limerick Dolans (11), Belfast Ulster Sports Hall (12) and the Bearded Theory Festival in Derbyshire's Catton Hall & Park. (23).

See www.janeweavermusic.com for more. **JM**

PRESS/NIC CHAPMAN

This month, Intro was compiled by
Jerry Ewing
Stephen Lambe
Emily MacNavin
Rhodri Marsden
Julian Marszalek
Natasha Scharf
Phil Weller
David West

EMERSON, LAKE & POWELL BOX SET DUE

The all-too-brief supergroup's complete works are collected for the first time.

Gathered all in one place: Emerson, Lake & Powell.

PRESS

Spirit Of Unicorn Music are to release a three-CD box set containing all the material recorded by short-lived prog supergroup Emerson, Lake & Powell. *Emerson, Lake & Powell – The Complete Collection* is out on April 12.

The anthology includes the band's eponymous studio album, plus three bonus tracks *The Score (Single Edit)* and B-Sides *The Loco-motion* and *Vacant Possession*. Also included in the box is their live album, *Live In Concert*, which was originally released in 2003, as well as *The Sprocket Sessions*, a CD of rehearsals that had previously only been available as a bootleg.

All of the material has been remastered by distinguished engineer Andy Pearce, who's previously worked with Deep Purple and Todd Rundgren. An enhanced booklet is also included with sleeve notes written by *Prog* editor Jerry Ewing.

Emerson, Lake & Powell formed when Keith Emerson and Greg Lake decided to revive Emerson, Lake & Palmer in 1984. However, with ELP drummer Carl Palmer enjoying considerable success with Asia, Cozy Powell – formerly of Rainbow, among others – was successfully offered the vacant drum stool.

Speaking to the *LA Times* in 1986, Greg Lake said, "When Cozy came in, he really dazzled us. We didn't intend to put the group back together but he was such a good technical drummer and such a good performer, we thought it might be a good idea to go back out with a new version of the band."

See www.spiritofunicorn.co.uk. **JM**

NEW DAVID GILMOUR ALBUM EXPECTED IN 2024

Guy Pratt and Roger Eno appear in photos posted online.

David Gilmour is rumoured to be working on a new solo record, which is expected to be released at some point this year. The new album would be the follow-up to 2015's *Rattle That Lock*.

Gilmour's wife, the writer and lyricist Polly Samson, has posted a number of photographs on her Instagram account of David working in the studio with various artists. These include long-standing bassist Guy Pratt, Roger Eno on piano, drummer Adam Betts, and bass player Tom Herbert (The Invisible, Polar Bear).

David Gilmour: high hopes for a new solo album.

GUS STEWART/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Samson also appeared to confirm the new album in an interview with the Romanian website *Ziles Inopti*. In an English translation, she revealed, "I hope to be back with a new novel as soon as possible. At the moment I'm working with David Gilmour on new songs. Promising, right?"

There is no official word as yet on a potential release date.

See www.instagram.com/pollysamson. **JE**

GETTER DEVELOPS HER PATH ON NEW CD

Song-orientated album hailed by the Premonition bandleader as "strongest yet."

Jane Getter Premonition follow their muse.

PRESS/LINDA HEATH

Progressive jazz fusion guitarist Jane Getter will release her third album with the Premonition band on February 23 via Esoteric. The New Yorker has told *Prog* how *Division World's* song-orientated approach has resulted in her strongest body of work to date.

"This album has been about letting the song dictate when it needs something, and when it doesn't," she reveals. "I'm editing my writing more. It doesn't have to be that I throw everything into the pot for one song."

Lyrically, the record charts the dichotomy of both personal and societal division. Although not strictly a concept album, Getter says it was important those themes resonated across the record.

"There's conflict throughout the album. We're very divided as a world right now, but that's not who we are as humans. And then there's personal conflict: feeling confused or going through something that you want to stop. I'm not trying to make the world a better place with my lyrics, but hopefully when people listen they might think, 'I'm not the only one that feels like that.'"

Her assembled band features two returning characters in keyboardist-producer Adam Holzman (Steven Wilson, Miles Davis) and Testament guitarist Alex Skolnick.

"He's the perfect guy for this band, because he's got a jazz and a metal background; he can play anything," Getter says of Skolnick. "When we trade solos onstage, it's always so much fun. He's got such a great vibe."

They're joined by a new rhythm section of bassist Paul Frazier (St Vincent, Chaka Khan) and drummer Gene Lake, who appeared on 2021 album *Anomalia*. Randy McStine (Porcupine Tree, McStine & Minnemann) returns for his second guest vocal appearance, having also featured on *Anomalia*. He can be heard on the track *Devolution*.

"I'm a guitar player first, so I always need to have another strong vocalist on my albums," Getter explains. "I wanted a Peter Gabriel kind of vibe and I knew he'd be great for it. I think the contrast of a male and female voice brings freshness to the album that I really like.

"Every album I've done, I've evolved and this album develops the path I started with *Anomalia*," the guitarist believes. "It's got an eclectic mix of everything I love: It's like Mahavishnu Orchestra meets King Crimson meets Tool." **POW**

"The contrast of a male and female voice brings freshness to the album."

For more info see www.janegetter.com.

INTRO extras

MAGNUM'S TONY CLARKIN DEAD AT 77

Tony Clarkin, guitarist, songwriter and co-founder of British rock veterans Magnum, has died aged 77. A statement from his daughter revealed that he passed away on January 7 following a short illness.

Formed in Birmingham in 1972, Magnum went on to release 23 studio albums across six decades. These included 1982's breakthrough *Chase The Dragon* and the recently released *Here Comes The Rain*.

Nektar: their unending imagination goes on.

PRESS/KARIN JANSSENS

NEKTAR'S *RECYCLED* TREATED TO BOX SET

Band to continue with new drummer that Ron Howden chose before his death.

Derek 'Mo' Moore – the longest-serving member of prog veterans Nektar – has recalled with fondness the live sets from Calderone Concert Hall in Long Island in 1975 and Toronto's Massey Hall in 1976. They both make up part of the five-CD reissue of 1975 album *Recycled*, which is out via Esoteric on March 29.

"Massey Hall was a fantastic place to play," he says. "It was packed out and I was told that the guys from Rush were there. We were really peaking at that time. People came from all over the country for the gig. The vibe from the crowd was great. Even when we play now, people come from all over. When we played in the US last year, we had people from Italy and the Netherlands."

Nektar's future was in doubt when the band's founding drummer, Ron Howden, died last September. However, Moore confirms they will continue and new music is on the way.

"When Ron passed, it blew us away," he says. "We'd been writing this music for about three years. We're going in the studio next week to do three tracks. Then we'll record the overdubs and then we'll go back into the studio for vocals and mixing. It should be out about April."

And Howden himself played a role in selecting his replacement.

"A few years ago, Ron told us about Jay Dittamo, who has replaced him," confirms Moore. "Ron approached him at ProgStock and he said, 'I've not been feeling well and if there's ever a time that I can't play, I'd like you to play for me.'"

See www.nektarsmusic.com. **JM**

GREENSLADE AT THE BBC COLLECTION TO BE RELEASED

Double-disc covering 1973 and 1974 is out in February.

Seventies prog rockers Greenslade are to issue their BBC recordings from 1973 and 1974 as part of a new two-disc set. *Greenslade At The BBC*. It'll be released in February through Repertoire Records and will feature two *In Concert* performances, both recorded at the BBC Paris Theatre, London, one from 1973 and one from 1974, as well as the band's November 1973 *Old Grey Whistle Test* appearance and three different Bob Harris sessions.

Greenslade formed in September 1972 in the wake of the demise of Colosseum, by keyboard player Dave Greenslade and bassist Tony Reeves, with keyboardist Dave Lawson and drummer Andrew McCulloch. Greenslade made their live debut at Frankfurt's Zoom Club in November 1972.

The band released both their self-titled debut album and *Bedside Manners Are Extra* in 1973, and *Spyglass Guest* a year later, after which bassist Reeves left the band to be replaced by Martin Briley.

See www.facebook.com/greensladeband. **JE**

Greenslade: bouyed by a joie de vivre.

PRESS

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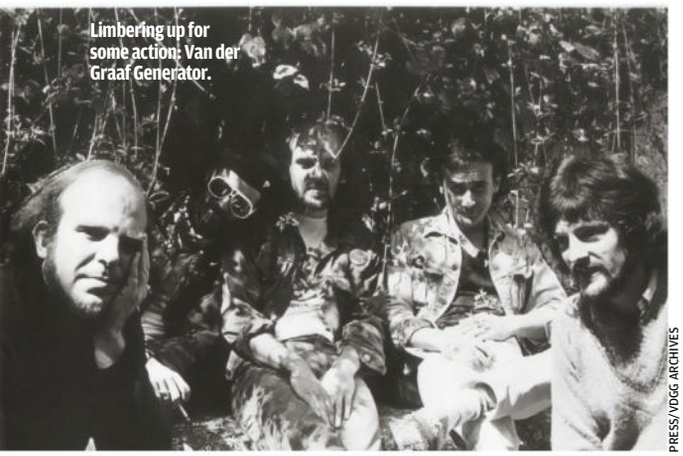
VDGG 70S-REUNION ALBUMS REISSUED

Frontman Peter Hammill reflects on a time of creative intensity and live ferocity.



Limbering up for some action: Van der Graaf Generator.

PRESS/VDGG ARCHIVES

Following in the wake of last year's mammoth 14-disc box set, *Interference Patterns*, Esoteric dip back into the Van der Graaf Generator vaults with reissues of *Still Life* and *Vital*, due on March 29. Initially released in 1976, *Still Life* was VdGG's second studio album after the band reformed to record *Godbluff* the previous year. Both of the reissues have been remastered and the former will be released on vinyl only, while *Vital* will be available on double vinyl and CD editions.

"The stars aligned for us. We felt there was work to be done," says Peter Hammill about the 1975 reunion. "It was a headlong period. Van der Graaf were always a slightly bizarre ongoing movie, but we were probably at our peak in this period. We were touring an awful lot, we made three albums in the space of 13 months, hardly any time to think. Sometimes that's a good thing."

Still Life came together quickly. Hammill had already composed two of the album's five tracks, the title tune and *La Rossa*, while writing for *Godbluff*, and the band's recording approach had moved towards spontaneity.

"In the first period of Van der Graaf, we did an awful lot of studio experimentation," he says. "In this period, we were pretty much playing live in the studio with just a couple of extra overdubs. From that point of view, you do it, you play it back, it's there, it's done, it is sort of a strangely weird out-of-body experience."

Recorded live at the Marquee Club in London, 1978's *Vital* was released after VdGG had split up for the second time.

"Possibly one of the most violent live albums ever recorded!" says Hammill, laughing. "At the time it was recorded, the writing was beginning to be on the wall for us and it was kind of an act of defiance to make *Vital*. 'Desperate' is the wrong word, but we knew we were almost out of money and almost out of time as well, so I think that's why it comes over as strongly as it does."

In related news, Joe Banks, author of *Hawkwind: Days Of The Underground* and regular *Prog* contributor, is working on a biography of Hammill, albeit with the subject's blessing but not his participation. "I've given him full carte blanche to get in touch with anybody he wants to speak about me, but I haven't actually spoken myself," says Hammill. "I've absolutely nothing against Joe doing this, but I'm still involved in living a life in a forward direction, I guess." **DW**

"*Vital* is possibly one of the most violent live albums ever recorded!"

See www.vandergraafgenerator.co.uk.

INTRO extras

STEVEN WILSON TO REMIX MORE GENTLE GIANT

Gentle Giant's ninth album, *The Missing Piece*, is to be reissued on CD, Blu-ray and 180g vinyl and a limited-edition transparent green vinyl by Chrysalis Records on February 23. The package has, again, been remixed by Steven Wilson. The CD/Blu-ray version includes a Dolby Atmos Mix, 5.1 Surround Sound Mix, Instrumental Mix, Original Stereo Mix and *Winning (Outtake)* bonus track. See www.gentlegiantmusic.com

North Sea Echoes: their debut album stands apart from the day job.

PRESS/JEREMY SAFFER

NORTH SEA ECHOES DEBUT LP LANDS

Fates Warning alumni Ray Alder and Jim Matheos head into new sonic territories.

North Sea Echoes – the new project from Fates Warning vocalist Ray Alder and guitarist Jim Matheos – have announced the release of their debut album *Really Good Terrible Things* on February 23 via Metal Blade.

"Jim was writing another solo album and he thought that it needed vocals," says Alder of the album's origins. "He came to me to see if I'd be interested. I said, 'Send me the music.' He did and I said that I'd love to do it."

Immediately apparent is the marked difference in sound from what fans of Fates Warning might expect. Here, electronics, ambience and an ethereal atmosphere infuse the album's 10 tracks. This, says Alder, was a conscious decision by the duo.

"It wasn't a case of, 'Let's do everything we can not to sound like Fates Warning.' There's a song on the last album [*Long Day Good Night*] called *When Snow Falls* and it's a sort of an electronic thing and to both of us, that song really stood out and we loved the way it came out. I guess we've followed that path."

Whether North Sea Echoes become a live band or not is moot, Fates Warning are remaining true to their word – no new music, but they may well still tour.

Adds Alder, "This year is the band's 40th anniversary so hopefully we'll do some shows around the world. I would hate to call it a farewell tour. Jim has always said he has no problems with touring, it's just the writing that he says he's finished with."

See www.northseaechoes.com. **JM**

CAN'S *LIVE IN PARIS 1973* SET SCHEDULED FOR RELEASE

It's the first live Can album to feature vocalist Damo Suzuki.

Krautrock pioneers Can are set to release the fourth in their ongoing series of live releases. *Live In Paris 1973* comes out on February 24 via Mute and Future Days on double vinyl, a two-CD set and digital. It follows the previously released *Live In Brighton 1975*, *Live In Stuttgart 1975* and *Live In Cuxhaven 1976*.

Live In Paris 1973 is the first in the series to feature the Japanese vocalist Damo Suzuki. He joined the band after being discovered busking on the streets of Munich by members of the band. He would go on to perform on what is arguably Can's most celebrated run of albums that include *Tago Mago* (1971), *Ege Bamyasi* (1972) and *Future Days* (1973), as well as the 1970 compilation *Soundtracks*. Suzuki quit the band just a few months after the Paris 1973 performance.

Live In Paris 1973 has been created by founding Can member Irmin Schmidt and producer/engineer René Tinner, who have compiled and edited all the albums in this series. See www.spoonrecords.com for more information. **JM**

She brings the reine: Can's Paris gig joins live series.

PRESS/SPOON RECORDS

FAD GADGETS

Rhodri Marsden on three of the latest must-have gizmos currently putting the prog in progress.

TEENAGE ENGINEERING EP-133 KO II SAMPLER COMPOSER

Swedish firm Teenage Engineering has carved out a very particular niche: retro-style products – usually with an orange flash – that have advanced music-making functionality. This sampler crossed with a groovebox crossed with a sequencer is a delightful toy; it looks for all the world like a 1980s calculator, but its buttons contain a wealth of possibility, from chopping and layering samples to building song shapes and adding effects and all running off a few AAA batteries. I don't know why the box features a picture of Muhammad Ali knocking out Sonny Liston, but who are we to argue?
www.teenage.engineering

RUARK R810

What with our enthusiasm for fluorescent Bluetooth blobs that stick to the wall of the shower or discreet wall speakers that let music magically emerge into a space, who is gunning for the good old-fashioned radiogram? The answer, until now, was "no one", but Southend-based Ruark have swung into this neglected space with the R810, a handcrafted beauty with veneered cabinets made from sustainable woods and a traditional grille with an embedded hi-res display. In terms of function, it's all Airplay, Chromecast, Spotify, TIDAL, Apple Music and DAB stations. Cute but dispensable.
www.ruarkaudio.com

ROLI SEABOARD BLOCK M

MIDI keyboards aren't very natural tools of expression. At their most basic, your fingers are telling the instrument how long and how loud to make each note, but that's about it. Roli have been making products which transform the traditional keyboard mechanism into something with soul; they call it 5D Touch technology, which basically means that new gestures (e.g. glide, slide, and lift) make new kinds of sound, creating a more responsive, nuanced bond between you and the instrument. The Block M is the pick of the bunch, and you won't be using it to play *Chopsticks*.
www.roli.com

MY PROG HERO

Inspiring the wider music world...

Somebody up there likes you: Derek Forbes (inset) soaked up ELP's influence like a sponge.

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

PRESS

DEREK FORBES

Forever associated with new wave, ex-Simple Minds bassist Derek Forbes reveals the influence of **ELP**, Steve Hillage and Genesis on their music.

"I first became aware of Emerson, Lake & Palmer at school when I was about 15 or 16. I went to see ELP play in Glasgow and watched your man Keith Emerson pull his Hammond organ all over himself and sticking knives into the keyboards and whatever. The thing is, we had this music teacher at school and she would belt us if we didn't know all the musical signs and notes. She used to play Mussorgsky and Purcell and Britten and that all saturated into me at that time. So I really love ELP's version of *Pictures At An Exhibition* by Modest Mussorgsky, especially *The Hut Of Baba Yaga*. And being familiar with that music, it was really interesting to see it being performed that way on Hammond organs and stuff. That really floated my boat and it was great to hear some stuff that was different because before then, I was into Led Zeppelin, The Beatles and The Rolling Stones, but this was so different. Greg Lake had an effect on my later playing. I first picked up a guitar around that time and I was like a sponge soaking everything up.

Working with Steve Hillage was amazing because he was a musician and a writer, too. But he couldn't decide what to leave out of our sessions so we ended up with 22 tracks, which we put out over two albums – *Sons And Fascination* and *Sister Feelings Call*. They came out at the same time. Steve Hillage had heart palpitations mixing the album and had to go to hospital. He was very inspirational. One time he played the Kelvin Hall in Glasgow where he played Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* with the Scottish National Orchestra. He flew from Germany to Glasgow to play the show and he learned the while thing on the plane on acid.

I later worked with Peter Gabriel and that was brilliant. The thing about Gabriel, when I was at college, was that one of the other apprentices in the class had a copy of *Foxtrot* and he gave me it in exchange for some album that I had. I'd never really listened to Genesis before, so then I heard it and then I'd sing through the whole thing when I was a painter. Simple Minds were big Genesis fans to start with. I loved the musicality of it all." **JM**

"Greg Lake had an effect on my bass playing. I was soaking everything up."

A Very Simple Mind: On Tour is out now via McNidder & Grace.

PROG IN BRIEF

John Mitchell (right) has been announced as the new guitarist in the **David Cross Band**. Mitchell's first dates with his new bandmates will be a run of live performances in Poland in February. See www.davidcrossband.com for details of dates and tickets.

Matt Page, vocalist and guitarist with US prog trio **Dream The Electric Sleep** has announced that he will release a brand-new solo album, *Apocalypse Garden*, on March 5. Go to www.facebook.com/DTESBAND for more information.

UK proggers **Jump** have confirmed their long-awaited return to live duties after an enforced lay-off caused by personal circumstances. They play the Winter's End festival on April 11 and A New Day Festival on August 16. More info at www.jumprock.co.uk.

IT LEADS TO THIS

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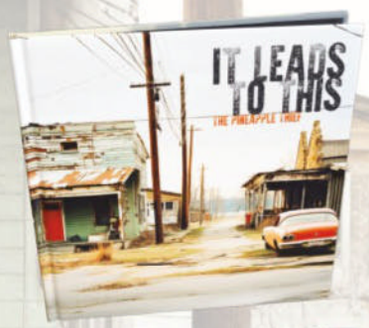

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STEVE HILLAGE

PARIS

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TEMIC

Prog-metal alumni band's pulse-driven project forms with a little help from Mike Portnoy.

THEY'RE A NEW multinational prog-metal project driven by the principles of electronic music, who boast established names within their ranks, but if it wasn't for Mike Portnoy, they simply wouldn't exist. While touring with The Shattered Fortress in 2017, keyboardist Diego Tejeida (ex-Haken, Devin Townsend) and Neal Morse Band guitarist Eric Gillette struck up a friendship that would form the nucleus of Temic.

"Eric and I spent those tours geeking out, talking about synthesisers, compressors and DAWs [digital audio workstations]," Tejeida remembers. "We share a similar, nonsensical sense of humour, too. So in 2020, when I knew I was going to part ways with Haken, I spoke to Eric about writing music together. He immediately jumped in. We had a long chat, discussing the musical vision, and agreed that our bandmates would have to be exceptional musicians, equally exceptional people, and bring additional skills to the table.

"I've learned from experience," he adds, "that having a defined vision of how you want an album to sound from the get-go is a powerful tool. I think a lot of bands try to use too many different bells and whistles on their first albums. We knew what we were going for: memorable vocal melodies, vivid harmonies and a constant pulse."

This draws heavily from electronic music, of which Tejeida is a huge admirer. "The energy often resides in the sonic experience rather than the musical composition," he explains. "Pulse and sound are absolutely everything, and that ethos has been a big part of our creative process. The reverb choice for the vocals is as important as the snare placement on the groove."

First to be recruited was Shining and Arkentype drummer Simen Sandnes, who was also a crew member on The Shattered Fortress tour. He was quick to suggest Maraton and 22 vocalist Fredrik Bergersen Klemp for vocal duties. Upon hearing his voice on a demo of *Count Your Losses*, Tejeida says "we were all blown away by his sound, control, and expressiveness". Intervals bassist Jacob Umansky, with whom Sandnes had worked with on his signature bass plugin software, features on the record, but hasn't joined the band full-time.

Unlike The Shattered Fortress and the slew of supergroups that pre-date the band, Tejeida has no intention of Temic being temporary; this is a future-focused band that are rapidly gaining momentum.

"Last summer, we spent 10 days together in Bortelid, Norway and it was the most productive time I've ever had with a group of people," the keyboardist reveals. "We filmed the music video for *Falling Away,* jammed together, wrote seven songs, announced the band, did interviews. We also discovered everyone in the band shares a passion for cooking, so we took turns cooking dinner every night! We're super-excited to bring this music on stage, and we're already planning shows for 2024."

The band's debut performance was at MidWinter Prog Festival in Utrecht, Netherlands in February and from there, they're now aiming for a limitless future. **POW**

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Fredrik Bergersen Klemp *(vocals),* **Eric Gillette** *(guitar),* **Simen Sandnes** *(drums),* **Diego Tejeida** *(keyboards),* **Jacob Umansky** *(bass)*

SOUNDS LIKE

Aphex Twin and Vangelis co-conducting modern progressive soundscapes, complete with keyboard wizardry, biting riffs and hook-centric vocals

CURRENT RELEASE

Terror Management Theory is out now via Season Of Mist

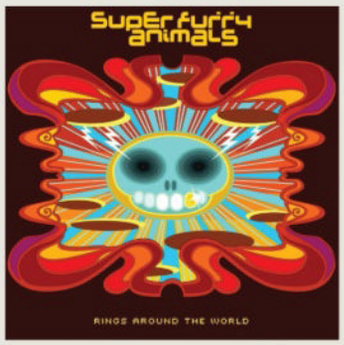
WEBSITE

www.temicband.com

> **"We knew we were going for memorable vocal melodies, vivid harmonies, and a constant pulse."**

Temic, a band who cook just as well as they compose.

PRESS



SUPER FURRY ANIMALS

RINGS AROUND THE WORLD

(Epic, 2001)

Emerging at the height of Britpop on Alan McGee's fabled Creation Records with their delightfully quirky 1996 debut single *Hometown Unicorn*, Super Furry Animals immediately marked themselves down as a breed apart from what was going on around them. Prodigiously talented and with a fierce intelligence and sense of humour to match, it was obvious to anyone paying attention that these Welsh wonders were in for the long haul. And unlike labelmates Oasis, who found themselves increasingly circling down the plug hole of creativity, Super Furry Animals moved ever forward with each subsequent release.

Their fifth album, and first for new paymasters Epic in the wake of Creation's ignominious collapse, *Rings Around The World* remains their most progressive and commercially successful album to date. Embracing the new eclecticism that developed in the wake of the post-rave world, Super Furry Animals here wove together a variety of threads that included rock, prog, pop, punk, techno, electronica, drum'n'bass and even death metal to create a cohesive statement that examines the human condition. Critiquing telecommunications, religious fundamentalism and pollution, the album themes feel uncomfortably prescient.

But Super Furry Animals have always recognised that heavy topics don't need to be heavy-handed. Coming on with a lysergic haze, this is an album characterised by a mood of levity and occasional absurdity that counter balances its lyrical concerns. Witness *Respectable For The Respectable*, which turns from a light-hearted bounce to a distorted growl, while Paul McCartney – yes, really – reprises his contribution to Brian Wilson's *Smile* by crunching on a carrot and celery. Maintaining their tongue-in-cheek approach, they put former US President Bill Clinton's extramarital scandal under the microscope ('*Another Cuban cigar crisis*') alongside erstwhile Russian leader Boris Yeltsin's fondness for a tipple on *Presidential Suite*, which sees fellow Welshman and ex-Velvet Underground founder John Cale tinkling the ivories.

Elsewhere, the title tracks evokes Hawkwind on a downer while *It's Not The End Of The World* blends the theme of extinction with the joys of growing older, all tempered by the band's quirky sense of humour ('*Turn all the hate in the world to a mockingbird*').

Taking advantage of the bigger production budget on the table, Super Furry Animals not only recorded the album on both sides of the Atlantic, they also commissioned videos for every track to release the first-ever DVD album. Coming complete with additional remixes of every song, the new format also took advantage of the advances of surround sound and home entertainment. And while that sounds quaint to contemporary eyes and ears, this was way ahead of the curve then.

Though bigger stars with bigger budgets have superseded Super Furry Animals, they did it here first. And that's progressive.

JULIAN MARSZALEK

ALL AROUND THE WORLD

Our far-out trip to far-flung prog

Staying sharp with her autoharp: Petra Hermanova.

PRESS/SPYROS DROUSSIOTIS

PETRA HERMANOVA

Transplanted to Berlin, the Czech musician rediscovered her mojo after an injury forced her to change instrument.

"I had some issues with my hand," sighs Petra Hermanova. "I had to stop playing guitar 12 years ago, so I started thinking about what instrument could I play instead. There weren't that many available to anyone who was recovering from a hand injury that wasn't healing. It was like, 'What can I actually do?'"

The answer came from the unlikeliest of instruments: "I bought my first autoharp about five or six years ago and there was something magic about it," smiles Petranova. "Many musicians have a feeling of instant magic with their chosen instrument and for me, it became something of an obsession."

Born in the Czech Republic, Hermanova left for Berlin with her trip-hop band, Fiordmoss, but success proved to be elusive. After they split up, Hermanova was at a loss as to how to continue her musical journey, but the discovery of the autoharp soon set her on a new course, as did her subsequent experiments with the instrument.

"I remember feeling, like, I want to send this angelic instrument through some pretty nasty pedals," she recalls. "I wanted to push it to see what was possible. There isn't so much information on what happens if you send an autoharp through a series of distortion and delay pedals, so it was fun to find out. I'm going down the rabbit hole with pedals!"

The result is her debut solo album, *In Death's Eyes*, which sees Petranova blending her autoharp with baroque orchestrations, folk music and an unexpected musical detour.

"I realised that I'd written an organ part on an electronic piano and that I would actually need a pipe organ," she says. "But that's always the case with me — first I make it and then I find out what it is."

Despite the logistical challenges of incorporating such an immobile instrument into her live work, Hermanova is continuing in this vein. "This is a sound that I'm feeling very comfortable in right now. It'll be interesting to make music in this world before I leave it entirely." **JM**

"This is a sound that I'm feeling very comfortable in right now."

For more information see www.petrahermanova.bandcamp.com.

PROG IN BRIEF

PRESS/ROB BLACKHAM

Mollie Marriott (right) is to join **Rick Wakeman's** The Return Of The Caped Crusader February tour after *Strictly* singer Hayley Sanderson had to withdraw due to unforeseen circumstances. For more info see www.rwcc.com.

Australian instrumental post-rockers **Sleepmakeswaves** will release their new album *It's Here, But I Have No Names For It* on April 12 via Bird's Robe/MGM and Dunk Records. They hit the road in May. For more details, visit the website www.sleepmakeswaves.com.

PROG PRESENTS NEW MUSIC
Listen to
HILARY WOODS
all this month on
PROGZILLA RADIO
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HILARY WOODS

The Irish artist evolves into a creator of totally immersive states.

"WHEN I LISTEN to drones, I listen with all my being," says Hilary Woods, as she considers her voyage into esoteric waters. "It moves through me, but it also provides an anchor."

Indeed, this is a musical form that, for Woods, "stretches and reaches back in time" while "moving and being moved by tectonic plates in sound".

Hilary Woods's journey into sound and music has been continuing on and off for almost 25 years. Born and raised in Dublin, she joined indie rockers JJ72 in 1996, but left the band seven years later and quit the music industry to concentrate on raising a family and resuming her academic studies.

Her return to music in 2013 yielded an eponymous album under the banner of The River Cry, but it was after signing to US experimental label Sacred Bones and releasing records under her own name that Woods began mining a specific and increasingly idiosyncratic niche of her own. Her debut solo album, the ethereal and atmospheric *Colt* (2018), was followed two years later by the sparse and haunting explorations of *Birthmarks*, and with her latest experimental release, *Acts Of Light*, Woods moves into the twilight world of drones and soundscapes. Combining field recordings with vast electronic sweeps and contributions from the Galway City Chamber Choir and Dublin's Palestrina Choir, as well as strings recorded by Norwegian bassist Jo Berger Myhre, this has been a wholly new experience for Woods.

"In many ways it was like painting," she says of the recording process. "There were many layers scratched out and reworked and kneaded into. Unlike *Birthmarks*, the tracks on *Acts Of Light* didn't have that same level of robustness to them. The material here was very supple and the tracks themselves were ironically far more sensitive to change. I had to act quickly in the mix as if I was moulding hot clay. Every tweak I made would utterly change the character of the track."

The melding of acoustic elements, such as cellos and human voices, with manipulated sound means that the resulting nine pieces on *Acts Of Light* feel as if they can be stepped in and out of while navigating the areas of light and darkness.

"I liked the physicality of making the different tracks and thinking of that process as a series of acts, coupled with the idea of having to generate one's own light," adds Woods. "I also felt that a record, which has weight, is sonically heavy and very textural, was in need of light but was simultaneously shining a torch directing light into the shadows. I liked the idea of darkness defining the light, and the image of making a record akin to striking a match in the dark and being presented with its luminosity and the places it has brought you to in the making of it."

A balancing act, for sure, but one without the need for safety nets. **JM**

"I liked the idea of darkness defining the light, and the image of making a record akin to striking a match in the dark."

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Hilary Woods *(electronics, field recordings, production)*

SOUNDS LIKE

An atmospheric blend of cello, voice and electronics that capture the light, the dark and the shade in between

CURRENT RELEASE

Acts Of Light is out now on Sacred Bones Records

WEBSITE

www.hilarywoods.com

Hilary Woods: shining light on darkness.

PRESS/ANNIE MITCHELL

Official Progressive Albums Chart

The prog top 30 albums

January 2024

Compiled by Official Charts Company

1 **PETER GABRIEL** i/o *(REAL WORLD)*
2 **STEVEN WILSON** The Harmony Codex *(VIRGIN/SW RECORDS)*
3 **ROGER WATERS** The Dark Side Of The Moon Redux *(COOKING VINYL)*
4 **SIGUR RÓS** Átta *(BMG)*
5 **OPETH** Damnation *(MUSIC FOR NATIONS)*
6 **WITHIN TEMPTATION** Bleed Out *(FORCE MUSIC)*
7 **MIKE OLDFIELD** Tubular Bells – 50th Anniversary Edition *(UMC)*
8 **PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING** This New Noise *(TEST CARD)*
9 **TAME IMPALA** Lonerism *(FICTION)*
10 **GOAT** Medicine *(ROCKET RECORDINGS)*
11 **YES** Mirror To The Sky *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
12 **GOAT** Levitation Sessions *(THE REVERBERATION APPRECIATION)*
13 **JETHRO TULL** RökFlöte *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
14 **STEVE HACKETT** Foxtrot At Fifty + Hackett Highlights: Live *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
15 **KING GIZZARD & LIZARD WIZARD** PetroDragonic Apocalypse *(KGLW)*
16 **MOON SAFARI** Himlabacken Vol 2 *(BLOMLJUD)*
17 **JEAN-MICHEL JARRE** Oxymoreworks *(SONY MUSIC)*
18 **JETHRO TULL** The Broadsword And The Beast *(PARLOPHONE)*
19 **OZRIC TENTACLES** Lotus Unfolding *(KSCOPE)*
20 **TESSERACT** War Of Being *(KSCOPE)*
21 **THE FLAMING LIPS** Yoshimi Battles The Pink Robots *(WARNER MUSIC)*
22 **RUSH** Signals *(WARNER MUSIC)*
23 **GONG** Unending Ascending *(KSCOPE)*
24 **ROGER WATERS** The Lockdown Sessions *(SONY MUSIC)*
25 **PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING** Inform Educate Entertain *(TEST CARD)*
26 **TARJA** Dark Christmas *(EARMUSIC)*
27 **HAWKWIND** The Future Never Waits *(CHERRY RED)*
28 **YES** The Yes Album (Super Deluxe Edition) *(RHINO)*
29 **TREVOR RABIN** Rio *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
30 **STEVE HACKETT** To Watch The Storms *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*

FIND OUT MORE AT **WWW.OFFICIALCHARTS.COM**

WIN! STEVE HACKETT LIMITED EDITION

Cover star Steve Hackett celebrates more than half a century of music with his first concept album since 1975's *Voyage Of The Acolyte*. The 13-track *The Circus And The Nightwhale* is available on a variety of mediums including a limited-edition CD and Blu-ray mediabook, which is up for grabs in this month's competition.

One lucky reader will win the collectable set, which comprises the full studio album along with 5.1 surround sound and 24-bit hi-resolution stereo mixes. The album features guest appearances from Steve's brother John Hackett, as well as Nad Sylvan and Amanda Lehmann on the vocals. The whole package is adorned with gorgeous artwork by Denise Marsh. (Now turn to p36 to find out more about its creation.)

To be in with a chance of winning this special prize, visit www.bit.ly/PROG147 and answer the following question:

***Voyage Of The Acolyte* was Steve Hackett's solo debut, but which of his former Genesis bandmates didn't contribute to the album?**

a) Tony Banks

b) Phil Collins

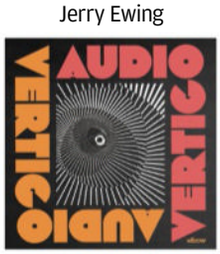
c) Mike Rutherford

For more information see www.hackettsongs.com

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: This competition will be open from February 2-March 8, 2024. By entering you agree to our competition rules (available at www.futureplc.com/competition-rules). Entries limited to one per household regardless of the form of entry. Use of automated devices as methods of submission are not valid forms of entry. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries received by the closing date. No employees of Future Publishing or any of its group companies or the employees of any entity which has been involved with the administration of this competition or any member of their households may enter this competition. All prize details are correct at time of press, *Prog* magazine reserves the right to offer an alternative, if necessary. The winner will be notified by Future by email after the closing date. If a winner has not responded after 28 days, an alternative winner will be drawn.

Now our turn...

The Editor
Jerry Ewing



ELBOW
Audio Vertigo
POLYDOR

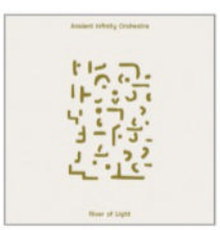
The Art Guy
Russell Fairbrother

NORTH SEA ECHOES
Really Good Terrible Things
METAL BLADE

The Deputy Ed
Natasha Scharf

DRIFT
11 Points In Time
GOD UNKNOWN

The Musician
Katharine Blake



ANCIENT INFINITY ORCHESTRA
River Of Light
GONDWANA

The Writer
Paul Henderson

PETER GABRIEL
i/o
REAL WORLD

The Reader
David Smith

GIANTSKY
Giant Sky II
GIANTSKYBAND.BANDCAMP.COM

HANDS OF THE HERON

British trio combine multilayered instrumentals and vocals with spellbinding results.

BEING LABELLED 'PROG' is still something of a novelty for Bristol-based Hands Of The Heron. But following a scene-stealing appearance at last October's Summer's End Festival, they're gradually starting to adjust.

"I really enjoyed how shocked some of the audience members were that they enjoyed it," says multi-instrumentalist and vocalist Beth Roberts with a smile. "But we don't set out to make music in any particular genre; we just make what sounds good to us."

The human voice seems to be the most important instrument at the band's disposal. Vocalist and clarinetist Claire Vine agrees: "There used to be a lot more instrumentation, but we do almost half of the set a capella now. We're self-taught on our instruments, but we've all sung a lot, so there's more ease in how we write for voice."

Guitarist and vocalist Bec Garthwaite adds, "I think vocals are at the heart of all our instrumentation."

"It's a place where we feel at home and confident," suggests Roberts. "Early on, we'd just sit around fires singing, so we create music with the expectation that it will be quiet, and the most direct way you can do that is by using the voice."

This approach leads to a more intimate performance, which influences where the trio choose to play.

"We want to play in listening spaces," Roberts says of their preferred venues.

Vine remembers some difficult experiences in the past: "We've played in noisy pubs, and it's not much fun if you're singing a song that means a lot to you and you aren't sure if anyone is listening."

"Particularly as we want to immerse the listener in our music," Roberts chips in. "We've actually played Exeter Library and Plymouth Aquarium."

Their debut, 2017's *As We Lingered*, was followed in 2021 by *13 Moons*. Released via their own label Cuculi Records, the album's 12 tracks combine the intimacy of their music with lyrical themes of an equally intimate nature.

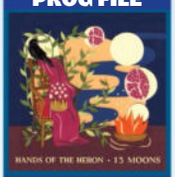
"Water, the sea and being in touch with our emotional states are important to us," says Garthwaite. "But Beth loves a story."

Adds Roberts, "I would say that both albums have concepts. The first was about surviving a break-up, whereas the second discusses personal realisation: the disintegration of who you are and finding another path. We've all contributed pieces, so it's not one story; it's more a theme."

Having slimmed down to a trio after *13 Moons*, Hands Of The Heron are hoping to record again shortly, with a view to a release and tour in the autumn. "Because of the way the three of us were developing musically after *13 Moons* came out, it seemed like the right time to become a three-piece," says Garthwaite.

"There is a collectiveness to the project that is important," Roberts continues. "Once one of us comes in with a song, we hand it over into the collective hands of the band. In fact, we're often complimented about how well we use our available layers. We have crafted a sound that is very full and yet sometimes very sparse. We want to showcase the dual personality of the band." **SL**

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Beth Roberts (*vocals, banjo, violin*), **Claire Vine** (*vocals, clarinet, harmonium*), **Bec Garthwaite** (*vocals, electric and acoustic guitars*)

SOUNDS LIKE

Glorious, multilayered alt-folk with spellbinding harmonies and diverse instrumentation

CURRENT RELEASE

13 Moons is out now via Bandcamp/Cuculi

WEBSITE

cuculirecords.com

PROG PRESENTS NEW MUSIC
Listen to
HANDS OF THE HERON
all this month on
PROGZILLA RADIO
progzilla.com/listen/

"We don't set out to make music in any particular genre; we just make what sounds good to us."

Hands Of The Heron are happy to focus on vocals above all else.

PRESS/WILLIAM LANE

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OLD EYES, NEW HEART

A massive return from Madder Mortem, who delivers a highly personal album with "Old Eyes, New Heart". Probably their most varied album so far, going from full power till the most tender passages. Pure bliss!

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DIRTY SOUND MAGNET

Swiss rockers embark on a psychedelic journey with latest release.

"I GREW UP listening to The Doors, Black Sabbath and Pink Floyd, but when my mother asked me to listen to *Led Zeppelin IV*, that day changed my life. I thought it was music made by the gods," admits Dirty Sound Magnet vocalist/guitarist Stavros Dzodzos.

"The day after, I picked up the guitar and I knew what I wanted to do. I didn't know how I was going to do it, but I had felt such wonderful feelings when I discovered music I liked – strong feelings that I wanted other people to feel."

Growing up in Switzerland, the band, including Marco Mottolini (bass) and Maxime Cosandey (drums), have been developing their wonderfully eclectic mix of atmospheric psych rock since they were teenagers. After spending 10 years experimenting with their sound, they've found their audience.

"In Switzerland, there is no one actually listening to this kind of music. There's absolutely no scene here. We really understood and saw the value of music when we toured in Mexico, where people were less materialistic and music really mattered. In Europe, I think rock music has been blended too much with pop music, and rock music as we see it has become dormant or dead. There's still an interest for this style of rock, and there's a few bands that are doing it, like King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard, but not many. And that's why we want to bring back what people have missed or have forgotten exists," says Dzodzos.

"I always listen to Ennio Morricone before recording; it sounds like the desert and gives the impression that the mixing console was covered in sand, there was wind. And Frank Zappa was so intellectual with his music. So when I'm in a Zappa phase, I can't listen to anything else. You're sucked in and nothing else matters."

Their latest release, *Dreaming In Dystopia*, is the result of years of jamming. "I like it when music makes me dream: I like to listen to something and feel like I am in the middle of a forest or something. That's what I love about music from the 60s and 70s – there's no boundaries. I call it no-limit rock and that's what prog is, limitless. Much like they did back in that era, we focus on the way we play together: we play simultaneously and we get the right take, then there is no editing needed. On *Flowers, Angels And Chaos* we edited the end of the track – we cut it out because it was just a jam – but we kept it on the vinyl record. The solo just keeps going; it's a seven-minute-long track. You even hear the drummer putting the sticks on the drum kit!"

Dirty Sound Magnet will tour *Dreaming In Dystopia* internationally this year and are planning to record new material.

"I want to go back to the studio very quickly, but it's difficult to find time because we are on tour so much," says Dzodzos. "I have so many songs that I want to record as soon as I can." **EM**

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Stavros Dzodzos *(vocals/guitar)*, **Marco Mottolini** *(bass)*, **Maxime Cosandey** *(drums)*

SOUNDS LIKE

An atmospheric journey into space rock with a story to tell

CURRENT RELEASE

Dreaming In Dystopia is out now via Wild Thing Records

WEBSITE

dirtysoundmagnet.com

PROG PRESENTS NEW MUSIC
Listen to DIRTY SOUND MAGNET all this month on PROGZILLA RADIO
progzilla.com/listen/

"When I'm in a Zappa phase, I can't listen to anything else. You're sucked in and nothing else matters."

Ennio Morricone would (probably) approve of Dirty Sound Magnet's techniques.

PRESS/KATHRIN RIEDO

Q&A

STEVE BABB

Glass Hammer's main maestro discusses the creation of *ARISE*, satisfying personal expectations and what it's like to steer the ship after three decades.

Words: Jordan Blum **Portrait:** Julie Babb

As the co-founder of Glass Hammer, multi-instrumentalist/songwriter Steve Babb has been at the forefront of American progressive rock for around 30 years. In fact, he's helped pen some of the genre's most celebrated modern works, including 2005's *The Inconsolable Secret*, 2011's *Cor Cordium* and 2016's *Valkyrie*. The band's latest conceptual release, *ARISE* – which stands for Android Research Initiative for Space Exploration – fits right alongside them, as it's a cosmic horror narrative packed with the group's trademark melodic and musical specialities. Babb tells *Prog* about the influences and ambitions behind *ARISE*'s amazing path.

Did any specific horror or sci-fi fiction or films inspire *ARISE*? For example, HP Lovecraft or *Aliens*.
Oh, definitely Lovecraft. [On the album] you've got a group of scientists who think they're the superior intellects of the universe, and when they take their android out into space, they quickly find they're not. So it just kind of becomes a battle. I mean, I *love* Lovecraft, and then there's Clark Ashton Smith and the movies *Interstellar* and *2001: A Space Odyssey*. You know, putting cosmic horror in a galactic context.

What interests you about making concept albums? Do you think it's almost a prerequisite of prog?
When I was much younger, I was into concept albums. There was something about the way they were presented like cinema. Plus, I need to tell stories, and for a long time (until a couple of years ago), this was the way I could do it. To be honest, I've struggled to come up with songs that sort of fall into a greater concept. Putting out a sequence of songs, even with a central theme, is somewhat of a challenge for me now. I much prefer to let ideas build up toward a bigger story. I've always liked using instrumentals as connective tissue, too. You should definitely sense that you've been somewhere by the end of it all. It's fun and our fans tend to be into that. That said, I never want the story to consume the music. It's just there to set a mood and give you something to think about. It's never more important than making sure the music is entertaining.

"The final track is basically a space-rock jam, and some of it reminds me of ELP."

Did the writing and/or recording processes differ this time from past albums?
This one was mostly done on my own. I had Hannah Pryor [vocals] come in for several vocal sessions, and I had Reese Boyd do a lot of guitar work on it. As far as the writing goes, though, this was almost a solo record. Fred Schendel contributed to one song; usually, he and I are throwing songs back and forth at each other, but it just didn't work out like that this time. At this point in my career, I basically am Glass Hammer, so why would I try to launch a whole new thing? As for Randall Williams returning on drums, we're not really looking at him as a bandmember, and it was just a logistical thing. Aaron Raulston just couldn't get to the studio, even though we both wanted him to. We're more of a studio project than a live band these days as well, but I do enjoy working with other people when I can.

The artwork is beautifully mysterious. How did *that* collaboration happen?
It's pretty stunning, right? It was done by an awesome Polish artist named Michał 'Xaay' Loranc, who also did our logo and the images for the last few records. Actually, I put the image online a few months ago and people said that they wanted to buy merch that displayed it, so I thought, "Well, that's my cover."

Was it difficult to come up with a new collection roughly a year after 2022's *At the Gate*? Did you feel any pressure from fans, critics or yourself when you started working on *ARISE*?
There is a certain pressure when it comes to promoting the thing on social media. Plus, I've got it fixed in my head that albums should come out during autumn, so I always try to get the current one done by early summer. That's the kind of thing that drives me, you know, and I don't see me ever waiting two years to put something out. I like to keep working and giving fans something to argue about regarding which Glass Hammer record they like best [laughs].

Would you say that *ARISE* is a good place to start with Glass Hammer?
Some people say this one is heavier than the last one, but I don't know about that. I mean, if you pick up *ARISE* and like it, you're probably going to like everything we've done, even though some of it's radically different. I think you could play any of these LPs for anybody and they would know who it was.

Do you have any favourite songs from the record?
The final track, *The Return Of Daedalus*, which is divided into three proggy parts. It's basically a space-rock jam, and some of it reminds me of ELP. It's so raw, and there's only one line of lyrics. We've never done anything like it, and I'm really excited about that. It's very chaotic, too, which ties into the overarching cosmic-horror vibe, and the music video we put out for it doubles down on that.

Speaking of your history, we're roughly at the 30th anniversary of Glass Hammer's founding and of your first album, *Journey Of The Dunadan*. Are you doing anything special for that?
I'm waiting on someone to throw us a big party somewhere [laughs], but no, not really. For our 25th anniversary, I think we did a T-shirt and a compilation [2017's *Untold Tales*]. You know, I've mentioned our 30th anniversary on social media and it's not like anyone's giving us a Lifetime Achievement award just yet. On the other hand, we're not at the end yet. Maybe we'll get a party in another 30 years?

ARISE is out now via Sound Resources. See glasshammer.com for more information.

The PROG READERS' POLL 2023

Prog magazine is 15 years old next issue. And, when I look back to our original readers' poll and then at this year's results, I can really see how far things have moved on from those heady, innocent days of 2009! True, some older evergreens are still there, but it really is like looking at a different landscape sometimes.

I would like to thank everyone who voted, even though it meant I had a mountain of votes to count when I returned to work after the festive period! Still, it's great to see such a fantastic response. Congratulations to all the nominees and a big round of applause to all of those who topped their respective categories.

This, then, was your prog year for 2023. Here's to even more diverse 2024!

Jerry Ewing - Editor

BEST BAND/ARTIST

1. STEVEN WILSON

2. MARILLION
3. THE FIERCE & THE DEAD
4. HAKEN
5. SOLSTICE
6. RIVERSIDE
7. LIFESIGNS
8. MOON SAFARI
9. TESSERACT
10. THE EMERALD DAWN

"In the increasingly dilapidated stately home of rock music I sometimes feel prog resides in the broom cupboard (or maybe the library?), so I thank *Prog* readers for their enthusiasm and support, not just in 2023 but over the past 15 years or so. I never take it for granted!"

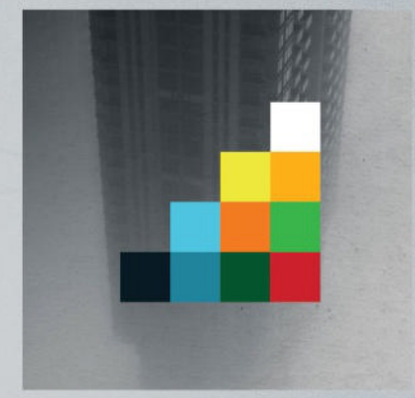
STEVEN WILSON

PRESS/HAJO MUELLER

BEST ALBUM

1. STEVEN WILSON
THE HARMONY CODEX

2. PETER GABRIEL – *i/o*
3. THE FIERCE & THE DEAD – *NEWS FROM THE INVISIBLE WORLD*
4. RIVERSIDE – *ID.ENTITY*
5. MOON SAFARI – *HIMLABACKEN VOL. 2*
6. TREVOR RABIN – *RIO*
7. HAKEN – *FAUNA*
8. VOYAGER – *FEARLESS IN LOVE*
9. THE EMERALD DAWN – *IN TIME*
10. SOUTHERN EMPIRE – *ANOTHER WORLD*



BEST VOCALIST

1. EINAR SOLBERG (LEPROUS)

2. PETER GABRIEL
3. STEVE HOGARTH (MARILLION)
4. JESS HOLLAND (SOLSTICE)
5. ROSALIE CUNNINGHAM
6. CODY BOWLES (CROWN LANDS)
7. STEVEN WILSON
8. MARJANA SEMKINA (IAMTHEMORNING)
9. MARIUSZ DUDA (RIVERSIDE)
10. PETER JONES (TIGER MOTH TALES)

"Wow, thanks a lot to all the people who voted for me! This is a very pleasant surprise. Thanks for listening to my newest solo album, and who knows, maybe you'll see something new from Leprous soon as well? But first we'll do our last tour for *Aphelion* in Europe. See you in the UK soon!"

EINAR SOLBERG

PRESS/ELENA SIHIDA

BEST DRUMMER

1. GAVIN HARRISON (KING CRIMSON)

2. MIKE PORTNOY (DREAM THEATER)
3. IAN MOSLEY (MARILLION)
4. RAY HEARNE (HAKEN)
5. DANNY CAREY (TOOL)
6. CODY BOWLES (CROWN LANDS)
7. MIKE MANGINI (EX-DREAM THEATER)
8. NICK D'VIRGILIO (BIG BIG TRAIN)
9. PIOTR KOZIERADZKI (RIVERSIDE)
10. PAT MASTELOTTO (KING CRIMSON/O.R.K.)

PRESS

"It has indeed been an amazing year to record and perform in so many inspiring musical situations. I'm very honoured to be in the company of all these great drummers. Thanks for the votes!"

GAVIN HARRISON

BEST NEW BAND/ARTIST

1. EBB

2. TEMIC
3. ZOPP
4. EBONY BUCKLE
5. CHRONICLES OF FATHER ROBIN
6. AZURE
7. RUBY DAWN
8. DOMINIC SANDERSON
9. MOON LETTERS
10. HARRY WHITLEY

"Massive thanks to *Prog* magazine and all of their wonderful readers for voting us Best New Band! We had an amazing time getting to play for you all in 2023 and are incredibly excited to bring you new music and a brand-new show in 2024!"

EBB

PRESS

GUITARIST

1. STEVE ROTHERY
(MARILLION)

2. ANDY GLASS (SOLSTICE)
3. STEVE HACKETT
4. TREVOR RABIN
5. MATT STEVENS (THE FIERCE & THE DEAD)
6. STEVEN WILSON
7. KAVUS TORABI (GONG)
8. CHARLIE GRIFFITHS (HAKEN)
9. STEVE HOWE (YES)
10. DAVID RHODES (PETER GABRIEL)

"A huge thanks to the readers of *Prog* magazine for voting for me. It means a lot to me to come top in the readers' poll, especially considering the competition! Thanks again."
STEVE ROTHERY

PRESS/ANNE-MARIE FORKER

BEST REISSUE

1. CAMEL
AIR BORN (THE MCA & DECCA YEARS 1973-1984)

2. YES *– THE YES ALBUM (SUPER DELUXE EDITION)*
3. JETHRO TULL *– BROADSWORD AND THE BEAST (40TH ANNIVERSARY MONSTER EDITION)*
4. MARILLION *– SEASONS END (DELUXE EDITION)*
5. GENESIS *– BBC BROADCASTS*
6. RUSH *– SIGNALS (40TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION)*
7. HAWKWIND *– SPACE RITUAL 50TH ANNIVERSARY*
8. PINK FLOYD *– THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON 50TH ANNIVERSARY*
9. HORSLIPS *– MORE THAN YOU CAN CHEW*
10. FISH *– 13TH STAR (2023 REMIX)*

"It's really gratifying to hear that *Prog* readers have voted the *Air Born* box set as Reissue Of The Year. It was an honour to compile and coordinate the content; the biggest of its kind I've ever worked on. I would like to thank Stephen W Tayler, Ben Wiseman and Phil Smee and, importantly, Chas Chandler and his team at Universal Music for giving this project the green light. Lastly, my thanks to Andy Latimer and Susan Hoover for their support and for the wonderful music, which means so much to me and, it seems, the readers of *Prog* magazine."
MARK POWELL

UNSUNG HERO

1. OCTAVIA BROWN
(2DAYS PROG + 1 FESTIVAL)

2. LUCY JORDACHE (MARILLION MANAGER)
3. STEPHANIE BRADLEY (MARILLION WEEKENDS COORDINATOR)
4. STEVE GOULD (FUSION FESTIVAL)
5. STEPHEN LAMBE/HUW LLOYD-JONES (SUMMER'S/WINTER'S END FESTIVALS)
6. BOB CHEATHAM (SOUNDLE WEEKEND)
7. PROGZILLA RADIO
8. BURNING SHED
9. RACHEL WILCE (PENDRAGON)
10. ARIE VERSTEGEN (DE BOERDERIJ)

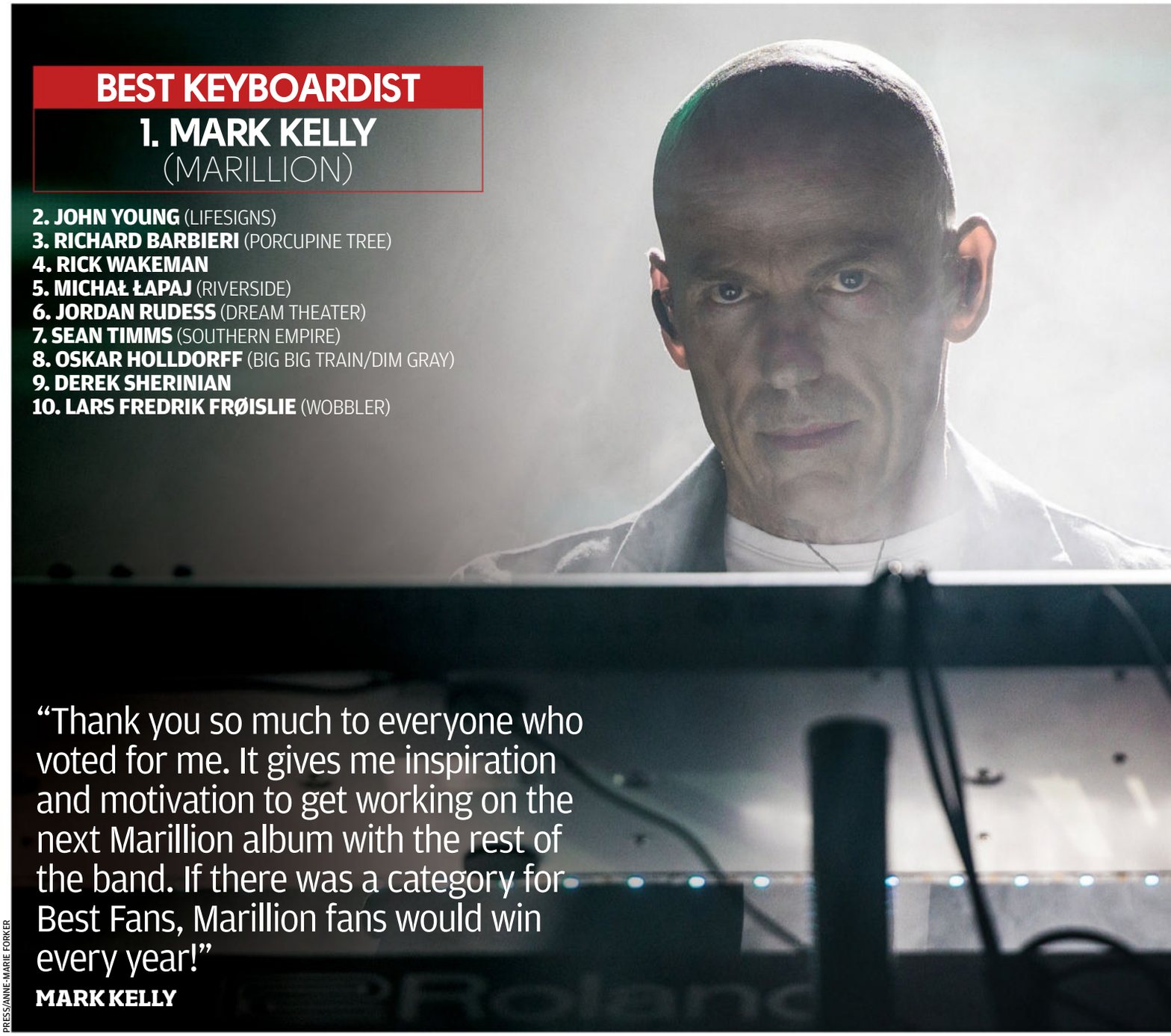
PRESS/LISA WETTON

"A huge thank you to everyone who gave me, and indirectly the whole festival team, their vote, because yes, the 2Days Prog + 1 Festival is very much a team effort captained by the incredible Alberto Temporelli. 2023 was a great but also very challenging year for me personally, so starting off 2024 on such a high note means more to me than you can possibly know!"
OCTAVIA BROWN

BEST KEYBOARDIST

1. MARK KELLY
(MARILLION)

2. JOHN YOUNG (LIFESIGNS)
3. RICHARD BARBIERI (PORCUPINE TREE)
4. RICK WAKEMAN
5. MICHAŁ ŁAPAJ (RIVERSIDE)
6. JORDAN RUDESS (DREAM THEATER)
7. SEAN TIMMS (SOUTHERN EMPIRE)
8. OSKAR HOLLDORFF (BIG BIG TRAIN/DIM GRAY)
9. DEREK SHERINIAN
10. LARS FREDRIK FRØISLIE (WOBBLER)


PRESS/ANNE-MARIE FORKER

"Thank you so much to everyone who voted for me. It gives me inspiration and motivation to get working on the next Marillion album with the rest of the band. If there was a category for Best Fans, Marillion fans would win every year!"
MARK KELLY

BASSIST

1. NICK BEGGS

2. TONY LEVIN (KING CRIMSON)
3. PETE TREWAVAS (MARILLION)
4. MARIUSZ DUDA (RIVERSIDE)
5. JON POOLE (LIFESIGNS)
6. CONNER GREEN (HAKEN)
7. JUSTIN CHANCELLOR (TOOL)
8. KEVIN FEAZEY (THE FIERCE & THE DEAD)
9. GREG SPAWTON (BIG BIG TRAIN)
10. AMOS WILLIAMS (TESSERACT)

"Well, it just goes to show that despite my tinkering with pop and folk all year long in 2023, the readers of *Prog* mag are still stalking me. I'm flattered and also slightly disturbed."

NICK BEGGS

PRESS/ANNE-MARIE FORKER

BEST PROG COVER

1. JETHRO TULL (#143)

2. YES (#145)
3. KEITH EMERSON (#144)
4. RUSH (#139)
5. MARILLION (#141)
6. KING CRIMSON (#139)
7. HAWKWIND (#138)
8. PINK FLOYD (#142)
9. MIKE OLDFIELD (#140)
10. RICK WAKEMAN (#137)

PRESS/LEON BARKER

EVENT OF THE YEAR

1. MARILLION WEEKENDS

2. PETER GABRIEL'S i/o TOUR
3. JOHN WETTON: AN EXTRAORDINARY LIFE
4. MIKE PORTNOY REJOINING DREAM THEATER
5. GEDDY LEE'S MY EFFIN LIFE BOOK TOUR
6. 2DAYS PROG + 1 FESTIVAL
7. VOYAGER AT EUROVISION
8. SUMMER'S END FESTIVAL
9. NENE VALLEY ROCK FESTIVAL
10. CROPREDY

BIGGEST DISAPPOINTMENT

1. CONTINUED INCREASING TICKET PRICES

2. ROGER WATERS – THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON REDUX
3. TRANSATLANTIC CALLING IT A DAY
4. YES – MIRROR TO THE SKY
5. BREXIT-RELATED TOURING DIFFICULTIES
6. POOR GIG ATTENDANCE FOR UP-AND-COMING BANDS
7. BANDS PAYING VENUES FOR MERCHANDISE
8. RAIL STRIKES
9. STEVEN WILSON – THE HARMONY CODEX
10. CAMBRIDGE ROCK FESTIVAL CANCELLATION

"Many, many thanks to *Prog*'s readers for voting our Marillion Weekends Event Of The Year. We're delighted with the poll result. Everyone involved puts so much into making these weekends as special and different as possible. But ultimately it's the fans that make the magic. We just turn up and bathe in it."

STEVE HOGARTH

With his first proper concept album in almost 50 years, guitarist **Steve Hackett** transports the listener back to bombsite-littered post-war London, with the record's fictional character, Travla, telling a symbolic tale of a journey towards self-actualisation. "It's been extraordinary making this record," he tells *Prog*. "I grew up in a time when music changed the world, and I've always felt the album can be a really powerful force. I really hope people enjoy listening to this one."

Words: James McNair **Images:** Tina Korhonen

Whale Tales & Circus Trails

"This is solo album number 30," explains Steve Hackett. "I suppose if I keep at it there's a possibility of the John Wayne award for 'Most Westerns In The Saddle'!"

Pan out for the prairie wide shot, and it seems extraordinary that Hackett has done so much since leaving Genesis in October 1977. Then again, he's one of prog's great enthusiasts, passion undimmed. "I still so much enjoy music," he affirms. "It's my chosen medium, just as my father's chosen medium was art. Dad painted the world, but I try and make it a film for the ear. And if ever I made a film for the ear, this album is it."

Chatting from his New York City hotel room, Hackett is referring to his spectacular latest record *The Circus And The Nightwhale*. His first 'proper' concept album since 1975's *Voyage Of The Acolyte* (the story of which starts on p42), it's partly autobiographical, but Hackett also employs a fictional protagonist named Travla (geddit?) to tell a more symbolic tale of a journey towards self-actualisation.

"It's the arc of a life that starts literally," he says. "Then it becomes more metaphorical and we start to embrace story, not just little Stevie Hackett and his guitar exploits."

Famed for their stylistic breadth and innovation, "little Stevie Hackett's guitar exploits" have kept us enthralled and entertained for more than half a century now. In recent years, January 2021's *Under A Mediterranean Sky* (No.2 in the UK Classical Chart) was the mellower, more contemplative yin to *Surrender Of Silence*'s symphonic metal yang, the latter Hackett record arriving just months later, in September 2021. Ringing the changes — and often — is Hackett's way, then, and he has also had the largesse to honour his and his former Genesis bandmates'

Roll up! Roll up! Steve Hackett welcomes you to the circus-like tale of a traveller.

"Music has to be fun, aside from all the detailed analysis that goes on."

formidable legacy via the medium of live performance. *The Circus And The Nightwhale* is something else again, though: a landmark solo album in which he goes the extra mile.

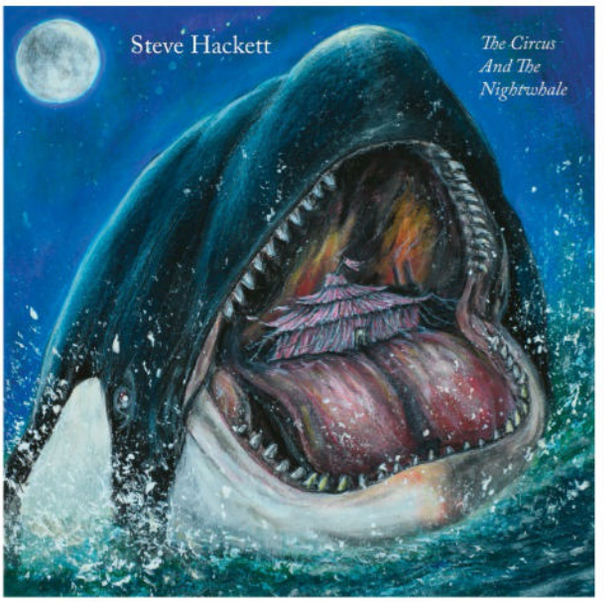
"I was considering the hero's quest that life is," Hackett explains. "The changes we go through and the challenges we face. I'd also been thinking about Joseph Campbell's [1949 book on mythical structure] *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, and his take on what a life journey is. Homer's *The Odyssey* comes into this album; *Pinocchio* comes in to it. It feels very special and personal, but I've tried to make it as inclusive as possible. It's pan-genre, tapping into rock, blues, jazz and classical. It takes you to different times and different places."

Having just completed the first leg of his Covid-delayed Foxtrot At Fifty + Hackett Highlights North American tour, Hackett is ostensibly on holiday. Yet here the amiable 73-year-old is, taking two hours out of his morning to talk to *Prog*. 'He who rests, rusts,' as they say. But with a fine new record to promote and a 2024 touring schedule that might daunt men half his age, Hackett shows no sign of becoming a carpet crawler. "Keeping busy gives me energy," he says. "Plus my hearing is good and my fingers still work well." The run-up to Christmas, he tells us, will take in a phone call to Marillion guitarist Steve Rothery, the pair having a project brewing.

Although Hackett has transported us back to old industrial Britain before (witness *Spectral Mornings*' *The Ballad Of The Decomposing Man*), *The Circus And The Nightwhale*'s opening track does so in a much more personal way. Using a sound collage comprised of 50s radio snippets sourced from Pathé Newsreel, the contemporaneous children's radio programme *Listen With Mother* and the famed Ovaltine ad jingle sung by vocal trio The Beverley Sisters, *People Of The Smoke* zaps us back to post-war Pimlico, London, where Hackett spent childhood hours playing amid devastation wrought by German air raids.

"With the bombsites, it was as if giants had stomped over that part of London," he recalls. "You had these Georgian pillars leaning this way and that, like rows of blackened teeth." Hackett could also see "a future Pink Floyd album cover" from his bedroom window — Battersea Power Station — as depicted with flying pig on the front of Floyd's *Animals*. It was Battersea, too, that generated much of the noxious air pollution *People Of The Smoke* refers to. No wonder the Hacketts had mixed feelings about the building.

"It was this monstrously huge thing," he says. "Consuming vast amounts of coal and spewing toxic waste, yet also keeping much of London heated. I had masses of chest problems growing up beside Battersea, but for my parents it symbolised the height of luxury. They'd come through the privations of war, so to have warm running water and underfloor heating felt like a very big deal."



Gulp: Denise Marsh's Jonah-like cover art for the new album.

Hackett's solo career, too, has generated much light and heat — and little if any waste product. *The Circus And The Nightwhale* seems to document how he did it, as well as flagging some of the obstacles he had to overcome. He repeatedly mentions 'individuation', a term psychoanalyst Carl Jung used to explain the process by which our gradual separation from the crowd can bring enlightenment. But individuation can also be a challenging process involving growing pains.

"That's why the album goes into another realm, as represented by the whale," Hackett explains. "That part is about possibilities, facing fears and doing the most difficult thing, even if it means breaking away from controlling influences. Sometimes that's what you have to do to find real love and have a wonderful soulmate."

The soulmate Hackett is referring to is author Jo Hackett. His wife since 2011, and his co-lyricist on *The Circus And The Nightwhale*, Jo, he says, "mentored and partnered" him on the album. "If there's something Jo doesn't like, it's usually because it's too casual," he adds. "She doesn't do casual — she'd rather have heavy metal. Jo doesn't do adult-contemporary, either; she wants something that's heartfelt, whatever the genre."

Another of the rites of passage the new album taps is first love and first liaisons, as explored on *Found And Lost*, a short, jazz-oriented interlude with Hackett playing smoky harmonica. He and his wife's relationship, though, is clearly one born of experience, and most likely documented by *Ghost Moon And Living Love*, in which Hackett sings: '*Whatever life brings, it has to be you.*' As is obvious from the blogs Hackett posts on his website, he and Jo are always together, inseparable.

The "controlling influences" Hackett mentions, meanwhile, occurred "post-Genesis" and were "both personal and professional". They also seem to inform the lyrics of heavy-riffing new songs *Get Me Out* and *Breakout*. *'Held like a butterfly glued to a pin/Pulled up and down by invisible strings,'* runs part of the former, while the two songs' titles speak volumes. Might Hackett be referencing the legal battle over his songwriting royalties, eventually settled in 2010, between him and his former wife Kim Poor, which also saw Poor challenge Hackett's right to make new albums independently? Perhaps.

Get Me Out is also one of a number of songs on the new album that feature serious guitar shredding from Hackett. "Yes, that's true," he says with a laugh. "I'm doing that thing that many may find tasteless but hopefully at least some may find thrilling. That 'wall of knives' thing is something guitars do very well, and when I hear it I feel like a 16-year-old kid again and start to smile. It's like you're on a rollercoaster, and you're not in control. But it's not about control — it's pure animal!"

Hackett goes into a little reverie about his early gig-going days in London. "I was just out of school and starting to do a bit of underage drinking — nobody seemed to mind in those days," he recalls. "I saw many of Peter Green's performances pre-Fleetwood Mac. My dream was to be a blues guitarist and harmonica player. Like most teens, I started to live the life as much as I could. But I never thought of drugs as a career move. I had too many friends who embraced the 60s dream and didn't quite make it back."

Elsewhere, the new album's heavy, proggy blues on *Taking You Down* also seem to tap into the more misspent days of Hackett's youth. Indeed, he's said it's about a young pyromaniac card sharp who taught him how to smoke.

Hackett has usually, but not always, exercised great quality control when commissioning and choosing sleeve art for his records. That for 2021's *Under A Mediterranean Sky* smacks a little of 'Will this do?', but the cover of *The Circus And The Nightwhale* is wonderful, another indication that Hackett is dreaming harder again. Denise Marsh's acrylic, ink-and-pencil drawing depicts a whale consuming a big-top tent, thus chiming with the long literary tradition (hello Jonah, hello Pinocchio) of folks being swallowed by vast aquatic beasts. Hackett has said the Nightwhale represents both death and rebirth. But what of the Circus? A metaphor for the carnivalesque world of rock'n'roll?

Hat's off: the new album explores the carnival of rock'n'roll.

"There's a lot of stuff, both personal and professional, embedded in its story. I wanted to address what my life has been like, what has been unique about it."

"I think so," he says. "More broadly, the circus is everything distracting that's going on around you, but the metaphor for rock'n'roll is apt. Musicians show up in town overnight, we set up our show, and then the animals come in, if I can describe my very talented performing troupe in that way [laughs]. Then it's pin back your lugholes and here we go! It's the oxygen we breathe, isn't it?"

Some of *The Circus And The Nightwhale*'s most frenetic playing is on *Circus Inferno*, which features soloists that include Hackett, tenor saxophonist Rob Townsend and Azerbaijani virtuoso Malik Mansurov on tar, a kind of Persian lute.

"It just keeps coming at you," says Hackett. "I often use the term 'salvos', but with bombardments that are merely notes, nobody dies. I also reject the notion that just because something is fast it's tasteless."

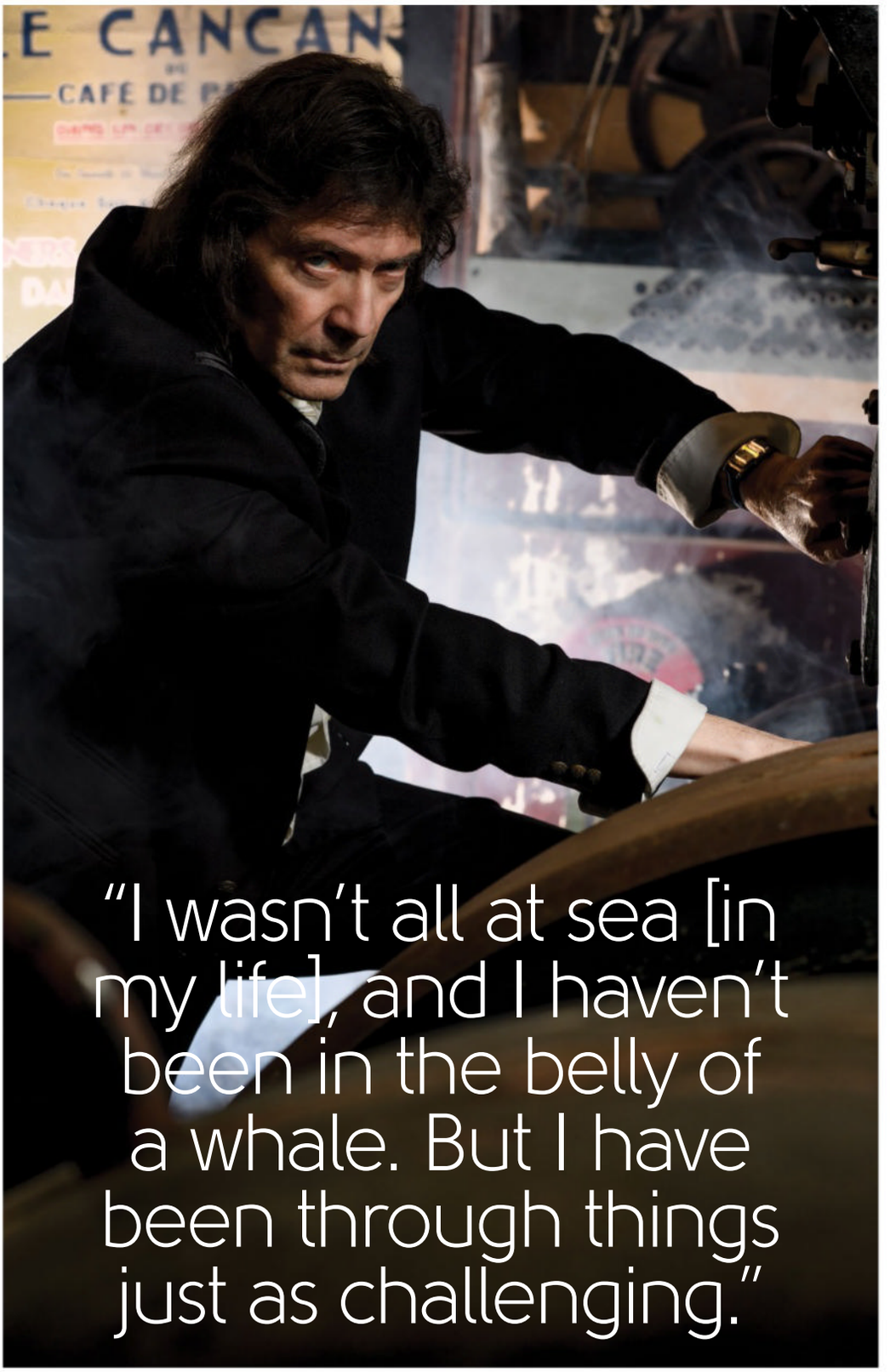
Rimsky-Korsakov's *Flight Of The Bumblebee*, for example.

"Exactly! There's a reason for the speed. I've heard [Scots percussionist/composer] Evelyn Glennie play *Flight Of The Bumblebee* on marimba at lightning pace as an encore, and it was quite brilliant. If you can play that at the same speed as Evelyn, good luck to you for putting yourself through that. So music can be like a sport, or indeed a circus. Think of the contortions circus acts and musicians go through."

Remarkably, *The Circus And The Nightwhale*'s theatre and fantasia was recorded between tours in 2022 and 2023, in time Hackett snatched at Siren Studios in the UK. "Sometimes it's useful to do things in stages," he says. "That way you can step back from a song and think, 'What does this particular portrait need?'"

Appearing on the record as well as Hackett and those already mentioned are Roger King (keyboards and orchestral arrangements), Jonas Reingold (bass), Nad Sylvan (vocals), Craig Blundell (drums) and Amanda Lehmann, Jo Hackett's sister, who also contributes vocals. Many of these parts were 'beamed in' from territories as diverse as Sweden, Austria, the US, Azerbaijan and Denmark, but these days Steve Hackett is very comfortable working remotely.

"It's something we first started to embrace when Covid struck," he says. "But that lockdown period made me reassess all kinds of things, and I found it frustrating and fulfilling. I enjoyed doing lockdown videos to try and keep people's spirits up. People say never apologise, but I had to do something for all those people who'd bought tickets for concerts they weren't going to see for another three years. We're still on Covid catch-up now; I was supposed to be touring the 50th anniversary of [Genesis's] *Foxtrot*, but it will be the 53rd anniversary by the time I'm done!"



"I wasn't all at sea [in my life], and I haven't been in the belly of a whale. But I have been through things just as challenging."

Pay *lots* of attention to the man behind the curtain.

With those remote contributions to the new album, how much of a brief did Hackett give his musicians? "Most of these guys and girls I know well," he says. "They're all capable of great musicality and dexterity, so I usually just give them one word of direction."

An adjective, presumably?

"In the main, yes! [Laughs] I might say 'Frantic!' or whatever. But in the case of the bass and drum parts, we tend to do a sketch on the computer and then send it over for the guys to listen to and embellish. You're farming stuff out, I suppose. Sub-letting. It's 'I own the building, but do come in and enjoy yourselves!' Music has to be fun, aside from all the detailed analysis that goes on."

Intriguingly, there's a melody on *The Circus And The Nightwhale* that was 'flown in' in a rather different way: it came to Hackett in a dream. Sung by

Amanda Lehmann in operatic tones, the passage in question appears amid the choral opening of *Ghost Moon And Living Love*.

"I dreamt that melody many years ago when I was recovering from [the often fatal] swamp fever," Hackett recalls. "I heard this beautiful music that felt very healing. More recently I was telling the story to [famed album cover artist] Roger Dean, and he said, 'I find that fascinating! Why don't you record it?' I thought, 'Are people really going to be interested in things I've literally dreamt?' But it felt like a gift, something otherworldly I had to use sooner or later."

Hackett sees music as healing – and his whale tale offers plenty of it.

Elsewhere, *Enter The Ring* is prog in excelsis, and takes a deliciously Jethro Tull-ish turn when John Hackett's flute joins the fray. Now Hackett's Travla character is in a filmic-sounding world with elements of fairground music. *Into The Nightwhale*, meanwhile, has an eerie heft symbolising trials and tribulations, Hackett using instrumentation to simulate whale song underwater.

"I wasn't all at sea [in my life], and I haven't been in the belly of a whale," he says in the album's accompanying biog, "but I have been through things just as challenging."

Whatever turmoil Hackett and his fictional foil Travla experience during *The Circus And The Nightwhale*, their overlapping journeys eventually lead to peace and fulfilment, as signalled by the album's mellow closer, *White Dove*. A poised and meditative Spanish guitar piece broadly reminiscent of Francisco Tárrega's 1899 masterpiece *Recuerdos de la Alhambra*, it showcases Hackett's masterful tremolo technique.

"For me, [Isaac] Albéniz and Tárrega are the blueprint of a sound that's very different to all the salvos, screams and dive-bombing that great electric players can do," says Hackett, explaining his long romance with nylon-string guitars. "Jimi Hendrix was describing the Vietnam War, the falling bombs, all of that. But the Albéniz and Tárrega tremolo pieces feel like they're describing fountains or hummingbirds. It's this idea of a beautiful energy moving very fast."

Does Hackett work hard to keep his tremolo technique in shape?

"Sometimes I can do it, but tremolo is an elusive thing; one of the most challenging guitar techniques of all. Sometimes it can take me two hours of warming up to get anywhere near the consistency that's required."

The Circus And The Nightwhale has gone down very well with Hackett's elders. His stepfather thinks it's the best thing he's ever done, while Hackett says his mother June, now 93, "wants me to crank it up, because she's such a headbanger".

Will Hackett tour the new album at some point, so that June can hit the mosh pit?

"I hope so," he says, laughing, "but I've yet to talk to the rest of the band to see what is and isn't playable live. I know that Roger [King, keyboards] doesn't like to reproduce anything that he can't actually play with his fingers, but if we're going to do *People Of The Smoke*, which literally begins with radio snippets from elsewhere, we might have to think again. Maybe it could be our walk-on music."

Hackett has said *The Circus And The Nightwhale* addresses things he's wanted to say for ages. Which things?

"There's a lot of stuff, both personal and professional, embedded in its story," he replies, a little cryptically. "I wanted to address what my life has been like and what has been unique about it. After that, it was a question of where to start — should I start in the 60s, when I was coming of age and discovering rock'n'roll? In the end I decided to begin much earlier, and that meant I could ask other questions, such as what creates music? Was rock'n'roll the thing that enabled polluted, war-torn London to get over its trauma? Healing is often the subtext of music, I think. At the very least, it can re-energise people."

And so, we ask, is that how *The Circus And The Nightwhale* has left him — healed and re-energised?

"Yes," he says. "It's been extraordinary making this record. I grew up in a time when music changed the world, and I've always felt that the album can be a really powerful force.

"I really hope people enjoy listening to this one."

The Circus And The Nightwhale is out on February 16 via InsideOutMusic.

Fantastic Voyage

Recorded while he was still the guitarist in Genesis, **Steve Hackett**'s debut solo album *Voyage Of The Acolyte* – and its commercial success – gave him a confidence he had previously lacked. Along with what he saw as winds of change blowing through Genesis, it helped him to soon make the decision to follow his group "pal" Peter Gabriel out of the band.

Words: James McNair **Images:** David Montgomery/Getty Images

Some solo careers are born of turmoil; a sudden, dramatic rift between an artist and the band in which they made their name. Steve Hackett's solo debut album *Voyage Of The Acolyte* wasn't born like that. After its release in October 1975, the Genesis guitarist made two more albums with them: February 1976's *A Trick Of The Tail* and December 1976's *Wind & Wuthering*. Indeed, Hackett wouldn't bow out of Genesis until after their May 1977 EP *Spot The Pigeon*.

"You have to remember that my experiences in Genesis were largely extremely positive," Hackett says today. "In fact, when we were touring *Selling England By The Pound*, a bit of *Foxtrot* and a bit of *Nursery Cryme*, I felt like I was in the best band in the world. For me, *Selling England...* is the epitome of the form. It's got elegiac lyrics and hugely accomplished songwriting. I was thinking, 'This is it. This is where I belong.'"

It was while making the follow-up to *Selling England...*, the double album *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway*, that Hackett tells *Prog* that his sense of belonging began to falter a little. *The Lamb...* was his fourth album with Genesis, and the one after which singer Peter Gabriel, who had brought Hackett to the band after seeing his ad in *Melody Maker*, left the group.

"I'm surmising here," says Hackett, "paraphrasing, perhaps, but my memory of making *The Lamb Lies Down...* is that Peter didn't really want to be part of Genesis any more. Composition by committee had become anathema to him, and his first wife, Jill, had had a difficult pregnancy. On top of that, William Friedkin, the director of *The Exorcist*, had approached Peter about writing a screenplay, and I think Pete saw that as a new world of multimedia possibilities."

To further complicate matters, when Friedkin sensed that his screenplay offer might spell the end of Gabriel and Genesis, he didn't want that on his head. "So he dropped the idea," says Hackett. "Then Peter came back and agreed to tour *The Lamb Lies Down...* and promote it. He also made it clear he'd leave the band after doing so.

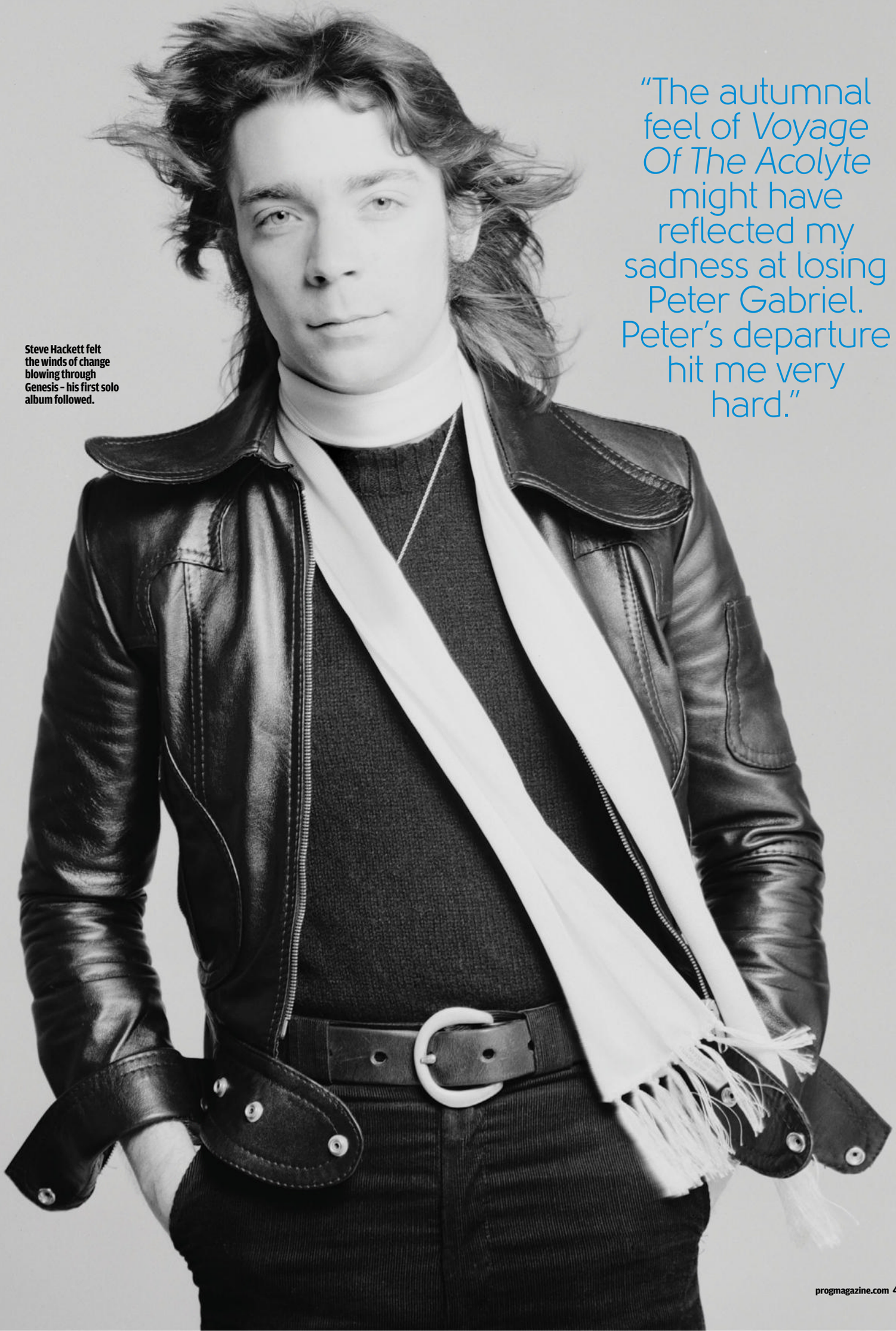
"Maybe what Peter really wanted was to take some time off, be a family man and resume with Genesis later," Hackett reflects. "But I wasn't party to that information at the time. That was more a conversation he had with Mike [Rutherford] and Tony [Banks], who were his fellow founding members."

The crux of it all, perhaps, was that old chestnut 'musical differences'. Within the very competitive confines of Genesis, Banks's keyboard-playing around the time of *The Lamb...* was becoming increasingly virtuosic, and Gabriel met this with what Hackett describes as "a similarly intensified approach to vocals, equally dense with lots of imagery. So you had this claustrophobic thing going on: two guys locking antlers within the band.

"Once we were losing Pete and everybody was at loggerheads over space in the music, everything got much more difficult," Hackett concludes. "True, I made another two Genesis LPs with Mike and Tony after Pete left, but what was being born in my mind was something where instrumentals were as important as vocals. That's why you've got *Voyage Of The Acolyte*."

With each of its eight tracks based on a different card from the tarot, *Voyage Of The Acolyte* was an esoteric, art-for-art's sake affair, rather than something governed or grounded by commercial appeal. Its delicate,

The tarot-themed *Voyage Of The Acolyte*.



Steve Hackett felt the winds of change blowing through Genesis – his first solo album followed.

"The autumnal feel of *Voyage Of The Acolyte* might have reflected my sadness at losing Peter Gabriel. Peter's departure hit me very hard."

Looking to the future: Hackett photographed at home, just after the release of *...Acolyte*.

CHRIS WALTER/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

Genesis in 1975, L-R: Steve Hackett, Mike Rutherford, Tony Banks, Peter Gabriel, Phil Collins.

Chinese watercolour sleeve art was the work of Hackett's then-partner, Brazilian artist Kim Poor. The cover depicts a travelling spirit carrying a fortune-teller's crystal ball. The inner gatefold shows a cave-dwelling, sackcloth-clad hermit. Genesis circa *I Can't Dance* this was not.

Hackett had written some of the album's material in US hotel rooms while touring *The Lamb...* with Genesis (something he found to be a useful distraction from his stage fright), but the recording of *Voyage...* began back in the UK in June 1975. Still on good terms with his Genesis bandmates, Hackett enlisted Mike Rutherford to play bass guitar, bass pedals and fuzz 12-string, and Phil Collins to play drums and sing lead vocals on *Star Of Sirius*. The flute-playing that might otherwise have fallen to Peter Gabriel was by Hackett's younger brother, John, a classically trained virtuoso who featured on many Steve Hackett solo albums from that point on, and became part of his elder brother's touring band until 1983.

"It was an incredibly exciting time for John and I," says Hackett. "We were working very closely together and I was living at home with my parents again. I was given a very decent advance of £20,000 by [label] Charisma, and we worked so quickly that I had money left over at the end. That was pleasing, because I'd never attempted to write a whole record on my own before and wasn't feeling terribly confident. I'd been concerned I might end up with a load of outtakes and waste the advance."

Voyage... was recorded at Kingsway Recorders at 129 Kingsway in London's Holborn. Famously the hatching ground for such tracks as The Jimi Hendrix Experience's cover of *Hey Joe*, it was a studio in which Peter Green, one of Hackett's early guitar heroes, had worked with Fleetwood Mac.

"Kingsway was actually in the basement of a building called Aviation House," recalls Hackett. "You couldn't make any noise until after 6pm, but after that you could make as much racket as you wanted – and we did. You'd sometimes hear London Tube trains when you were in the echo chamber they had there, but that just added to the special subterranean character of the place. It was bit like being down in the War Rooms or something: 'Here we are with mighty forces at our disposal!'"

Statements of intent don't come much more bold than the album's astonishing opener, *Ace Of Wands*. In the tarot deck, that card symbolises inspiration, potential, fun and growth – all things someone embarking on a solo career might hope for.

"Yes, that's it precisely," says Hackett. "One of the many books about the tarot I was reading at that time described it as the beginning of a new venture, so with *Ace Of Wands* and what that card means, I thought what could be more apropos?"

"I'd never attempted to write a whole record on my own before, and wasn't feeling terribly confident. I'd been concerned that I might end up with a load of outtakes and waste the advance."

ARMANDO GALLO

GUSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Hackett and Collins in Rotterdam, April 11, 1975. Collins would showcase his vocals up-front on *...Acolyte*.

Other players on the sometimes classical-sounding *Voyage Of The Acolyte* included Robin Miller on oboe and English horn, cellist Nigel Warren-Green, John Acock on all kinds of keyboards, and Percy Jones of jazz-fusion band Brand X on bass. Phil Collins also played in Brand X, whose debut album *Unorthodox Behaviour* would be released the following year. Hackett confirms that Jones came to *Voyage...* via Collins, but the bassist was also recommended to Hackett by Brian Eno.

"Percy would always do something spontaneous and brilliant," says the guitarist. "That anarchic fretless part on *A Tower Struck Down* is him. Percy wasn't a 'follow the riff' kind of guy."

Elsewhere, it was bassist John Gustafson (then with the Ian Gillan Band) who played on the brilliantly arranged *Star Of Sirius*, his inclusion likely somewhat serendipitous, since Kingsway Studios was by that point owned by Gillan together with Deep Purple producer Martin Birch. Of Collins's lead vocals on *Star Of Sirius* (Collins also played drums and vibraphone on the song), Hackett says: "Phil was only really singing back-up to Peter [Gabriel] prior to that, but I knew he had this really great voice and I asked him to do it. Phil and Peter had quite similar voices. I remember they could impersonate each other."

If Hackett seems just a little cautious when asked about his burgeoning interest in the tarot around the time of *Voyage...*, it's perhaps understandable. Occult practices and rock music are not always happy bedfellows, and the innocuous has sometimes been sensationalised. Still, *Prog* wants to know more. Would Hackett have tarot readings done back then? Would he do readings for others?

"Yes, all of that," he says. "I was beginning to be drawn to spiritualists and messages from beyond. I also felt that naming each song after a tarot card would give the album cohesion."

In the tarot, the Tower card represents upheaval and destruction, hence the instrumental *A Tower Struck Down* feels edgy, ominous. The fabulous B-section riff that first appears at 1 minute 17 was composed by John Hackett. Elsewhere, operatic voices played on Mellotron have shades of Carl Orff's devilish 1935 cantata *Carmina Burana*. *A Tower Struck Down*'s malevolent feel is cemented by its sinister soundscape section, which includes an archive recording of Nazi Party supporters chanting "Sieg heil!"

As someone who had grown up in the post-Blitz bombsites of London, it was natural for Hackett to document destruction in *A Tower Struck Down*, but *Prog* wonders if, circa *Voyage...*, he ever felt uneasy drawing inspiration from some more foreboding cards?

"No," he says. "Because tarot, for me, symbolises a number of possibilities. And when you read the various analyses of the Death card, say, it's not meant to be taken literally. I think it's most aptly described as symbolising the end of one way of life and the beginning of another. Not that I decided to write a song called *Death*. I thought that might be a bit much!"

Perhaps we've all seen too many movies where the Death card proceeds someone copping it? "Yes," Hackett agrees, smiling. "It's made for it, isn't

it? Like in the tarot scene in *Live And Let Die*. I only ever took the tarot metaphorically," he adds. "I saw it as an extension of other philosophical ideas."

So tarot was part of his interest in other esoteric subjects?

"Yeah. I remember reading [Scottish psychiatrist] RD Laing's *The Divided Self: An Existential Study In Sanity And Madness*, for example. Years later, I wrote a song about it [2012's *Divided Self*, by Hackett and Chris Squire's side-project Squackett]. I'd get hold of the most perplexing material and try to understand it; start at the top of the mountain and work my way down. I'm a bit of an extremist that way."

There is, as Hackett acknowledges, a beautiful melancholy to much of *Voyage Of The Acolyte*. Or, as he puts it, "a kind of autumnal aspect". It's there in the almost baroque arrangement of *Hands Of The Priestess – Pt. I*, it's there in the delicate Spanish guitar intro of *The Lovers*, and it's certainly there in the cello-and-flute-ornamented *The Hermit*, where, some 16 minutes into Hackett's solo debut, a vocal finally arrives. It's Hackett himself we hear, singing in rich yet unassuming tones: *'The mantle of attainment weighs heavy on his shoulders.'* What was behind that intriguing lyric?

"It was one interpretation of the Hermit card that I'd read, so I borrowed it," he says. "That song has a very young lyric by a very young me, and the young me was not very self-confident. I felt I still had all these things to do, all these things to achieve."

The last of the three tracks with vocals on *Voyage Of The Acolyte* is *Shadow Of The Hierophant*. Based on a piece of music Hackett had previously rehearsed with Genesis while the band were looking at possible new material, the *Voyage...* version features Sally Oldfield, younger sister of Mike Oldfield, on pristine lead vocals.

Hackett had been a long-time fan of the Oldfield siblings' 1969 LP *The Sallyangie*, and acknowledges that its charming, chamber-folk sound of flutes and harpsichords and 12-string guitars might have been a subconscious influence on *Voyage...* "I always loved that record, and so I got in touch with Sally and asked her to work with me," he says. "She did an incredible job, and I believe her solo career blossomed not too long after that. Sally was a real go-getter with lots of self-belief."

Hackett agrees that the Mellotron, as used in *The Hermit*, was an important part of *Voyage Of The Acolyte*'s overall sound. The none-more-prog instrument had been a favourite of his while still in Genesis, and although Banks had used one on the band's 1970, pre-Hackett, LP *Trespass*, it was Hackett who campaigned for its continued use as part of Genesis's arsenal: "I was always banging on about Mellotron, always trying to get them to use more."

Thus, when Fred Munt, who worked in the office at Charisma Records, told Hackett that King Crimson were selling one of their Mellotrons, Hackett went to meet Robert Fripp, taking Banks with him.

"The short story is we bought one: a big, double-stop one like The Beatles used. King Crimson seemed to have a few of them to offload. Then Tony started doing brilliant things with it, and became possibly the best Mellotron player ever. Listen to his intro on *Watcher Of The Skies*. Listen to *The Fountain Of Salmacis*."

Hackett took the Mellotron with him for *Voyage...* and used it to add spectral, plaintive textures that deepen the LP's exquisite melancholy. Where did that mood come from?

"The autumnal feel of *Voyage Of The Acolyte* might have reflected my sadness at losing Peter Gabriel," muses the guitarist. "Peter's departure hit me very hard. I'd had this pal in the band, and now he was gone. Peter was a constructive radical within Genesis, and after he left I felt we were in danger of retiring into things that were too familiar. ...*Acolyte* allowed me to try new things. I had nylon-string on *The Lovers*, for example. I was trying to get this Cinderella instrument to the ball."

> "It was an incredibly exciting time for [brother] John and I. We were working very closely together and I was living at home with my parents again."

Did Hackett play *Voyage Of The Acolyte* to Gabriel at the time?

"He did hear it, yes. Tony Stratton Smith [Charisma Records founder/Genesis manager] said to me, 'You've got two new fans: Peter and Jill [Gabriel's then-wife].' I don't ask for sanction from other musicians, but that was lovely to hear."

And what of *The Fool*, the fabled extra track Hackett reportedly recorded for *Voyage Of The Acolyte*? In press interviews from the period, he described the song as sounding like "ELO-meets-The Who". It didn't make the cut, and has never been heard of since.

"It does sound tantalising," he says, "but I have absolutely no memory of recording it! Perhaps I rejected it because The Beatles had already done *The Fool On The Hill*. There was another extra track for ...*Acolyte*, too, something that I was calling *Seven Of Cups*, but that eventually resurfaced as *The Virgin & The Gypsy* [from 1979's *Spectral Mornings*]."

Hackett's working title for his solo debut was *Premonitions*. Tony Stratton Smith wasn't keen on that, though, and suggested *Voyage Of The Acolyte* instead. "I think the implication of my original title wasn't lost on him," says Hackett. "The idea of things to come and me possibly abandoning Genesis, which I hadn't yet done, of course."

In the end, Hackett was happy to go with Stratton Smith's suggested title.

"I felt very lucky to be making a solo album with Charisma's backing, so there was an element of loyalty there. Tony had been very supportive."

And so it was that, against all odds, Steve Hackett, Genesis's quiet partner and last man in, became the first member of the band to release a solo album. Peter Gabriel's self-titled debut wouldn't arrive until 1977, Tony Banks's *A Curious Feeling* was released in 1979, Mike Rutherford's *Smallcreep's Day* in 1980, and Phil Collins's *Face Value* in 1981.

Better yet, when *Voyage Of The Acolyte* was released in October 1975, it quickly reached No.26 in the UK. Was Hackett surprised by that?

"Very surprised," he says. "I don't think anybody expected the new boy in Genesis to have a hit album, and I was very proud of getting a silver disc for it. The record company recouped their advance, everybody was happy."

What did Hackett learn while making his solo debut?

"Maybe that trying to write 'like me' songs is an oversubscribed club. You've got to do something that you really like yourself, and if you're lucky people will buy it and you'll be able to continue. *Voyage Of The Acolyte* was a bit like the story of the ugly ducking, really. As Danny Kaye sings in that 1950s song, the ugly ducking eventually becomes a swan – but he only realises he's a swan when he sees his own reflection. It's a fairy tale told to give children self-confidence, and ...*Acolyte* gave me confidence.

"I came to realise that the star of the show has to be the music, and the music's got to be fun, too," Hackett concludes. "You don't have to be like me, burying yourself in a beard and glasses for the first five years. I was very introverted, I don't know why. Strut your stuff! Do your thing!"

See www.hackettsongs.com for the latest news and tour dates.

Through The Prog Window

After years spent wandering the dark caves of the extreme-metal underworld, with 2003's *Damnation* album, awash with that most un-metal instrument the Mellotron, **Opeth** emerged into the light with leader and songwriter Mikael Åkerfeldt now flying the flag of a card-carrying progressive rock fan. Ahead of the album's 20th-anniversary reissue, *Prog* spoke to him about a record he says was "a normal prog-rock record, but for Opeth was completely new and unique."

Words: Dave Everley
Images: Mick Hutson/Getty Images

Opeth frontman Mikael Åkerfeldt was sitting in a cheap hotel in the unglamorous Derbyshire town of Ripley when he heard Steven Wilson's rough mix of his band's album *Damnation* for the first time. It was late summer 2002, and Åkerfeldt and guitarist Peter Lindgren were mixing *Damnation*'s heavier sister album, *Deliverance*, with Andy Sneap at the latter's nearby studio.

"We only had one pair of headphones between us," Åkerfeldt recalls now. "I said to Peter, 'Can I go first?' I listened to it and thought, 'Oh God, I can't believe it's us. It was pretty amazing to me. I got shivers listening to it. I've got shivers thinking about it now."

"I got shivers listening to it. I've got shivers thinking about it now."

Until that point, Opeth had been viewed as knotty, complex extreme metal band whose signature sound fused blasts of roaring noise with bursts of clean vocals and moments of bucolic beauty. But *Deliverance* and *Damnation* unspliced the two constituent parts of their DNA. Where *Deliverance* (released November 2002) leaned wholly into the heaviness, *Damnation* (following five months later) was *all* clean vocals and crystal beauty.

Double whammy: Opeth released two wildly different albums back-to-back.

With its sinuous, stripped-down sound and heavy use of Mellotron, *Damnation* wore the influence of Camel, Nick Drake and King Crimson's quieter moments proudly on the sleeve of its brown corduroy jacket. After a decade of swimming in metal's darker waters, this was Mikael Åkerfeldt's coming-out party as a true-blooded progressive rock fan.

"In a way I think *Damnation* isn't that unique," says Åkerfeldt. "It's a normal prog rock record. It's not particularly new-sounding in the grand scheme of things, but for Opeth it was *completely* new and unique."

The singer is talking to *Prog* at his home in Sweden, a few weeks before *Damnation* gets a slightly belated 20th-anniversary vinyl reissue. He went to see hard rockers Europe play a homecoming show in Stockholm last night and he has the hangover to prove it. But even without the alcohol-induced rough edges, Åkerfeldt still has superhuman levels of self-deprecation. "People give so much love to *Damnation*," he says wryly at one point. "Even I have to go, 'Yeah, it's alright.' You can't get too carried away."

The Opeth that made *Damnation* had the wind in their sails thanks to the acclaim that greeted their fourth and fifth albums, 1999's *Still Life* and 2001's prog-metal landmark *Blackwater Park*. By that point, Åkerfeldt had slid into the role of Opeth's de facto leader ("Pretty much because no one else wanted to do it"). He had a clear idea of what he wanted to do next — and it didn't involve making a prog record.

"We said, 'Let's do a super-heavy record," he says. "But as I was writing this heavy stuff, I kept coming up with things that were softer, like [*Damnation*'s opening track] *Windowpane*. I was thinking, 'That's not good. What do I do? I don't want to write a soft record.'"

It was Jonas Renkse, singer with fellow Swedes Katatonia, who came up with a solution: make two records. "I thought, 'Hmmm, not a bad idea.' I was very confident in those days: 'Two albums? Not a problem. I've got shitloads of ideas.'"

For a vintage rock fanatic such as Åkerfeldt, a double album would have been a logical course of action. Except he wanted to keep the heavy material and the quieter material separate and distinct. "I wanted to release them as two different albums on the same day," he says. "I wanted each one to stand on their own two feet."

That was easier said than done. Both Guns N' Roses and Bruce Springsteen had released two albums simultaneously. The problem was that Opeth weren't Guns N' Roses or Bruce Springsteen, and their label, Music For Nations, said no.

"They maybe saw it as us wanting to get out of the contract early, like when a band does a deliberately shit album," says Åkerfeldt. "But I was adamant and also not a very good businessman, so I said, 'Let's make these two records count as one album — you get two for the price of one, we won't spend that much more money on recording.'"

The label grudgingly agreed, but insisted the records would come out separately: the heavier, more metal-friendly *Deliverance* first, the softer, more risky *Damnation* a few months later. Åkerfeldt had got his way, albeit with a compromise. But that was the easy part.

Opeth's first choice of studio, Gothenburg's Studio Fredman, run by *Still Life* co-producer Fredrik Nordström, was being refurbished. Nordström pointed them in the direction of Nacksving, a cosy former restaurant in the middle of Gothenburg with vaulted ceilings ("Like a monastery," says Åkerfeldt).

Steven Wilson, who had been introduced to Opeth's music a few years earlier and had subsequently produced *Blackwater Park*, was on board to co-produce the two albums. The band would finish off the records at Wilson's No Man's Land studio in Hemel Hempstead, following a brief stint at the finished Studio Fredman. But at that early stage in Nacksving, the band were left to their own devices. "Frederik set up the sound and then pissed off," Åkerfeldt says. "No one else was there, so Peter and I were sitting there with two-inch tapes, wondering how the hell to do it."

Still, Åkerfeldt was feeling cocky. They'd written most of the last two albums in the studio, so why change a winning formula?

"I don't think I had a single finished idea when we went into Nacksving," says the frontman, who shouldered the burden of songwriting on his own. "And we didn't rehearse, either."

That's when the scale of the task began to dawn on him. Åkerfeldt had elected to record the heavy songs for *Deliverance* first, followed by *Damnation*'s quieter material. But getting the former out of the way was a tough ask.

"With *Deliverance* I was writing during the night and recording during the day, chain-smoking cigarettes, sleeping on the studio floor," he says. "I was tired and not inspired. I just wanted to get it out the way."

It didn't help that Opeth themselves were starting to come apart at the seams. Peter Lindgren, who had been in the band since

"I wanted *Damnation* to be a Mellotron record. Steve and I would look at each other and say, 'Should we have some Mellotron on this?' And I'd say, 'Yeah, soak it.'"

Damnation brought out Opeth's softer side.

1991, and drummer Martin Lopez were distracted, which added to Åkerfeldt's stress.

"Peter pissed off right as we were about to start recording the guitars: 'I'm going to a party, I'll be away for a week or two.' I guess he lost interest. He didn't really play rhythm guitar on the records . I did most of it because he wasn't there." (Lindgren and Lopez would make last one more album, 2005's *Ghost Reveries*, before departing).

Despite it being largely recorded in the same studio in the same time frame, *Damnation* would be different in every respect. The stresses that seemed so all-encompassing that they turned Åkerfeldt's shit grey at one point dissipated. "Once *Deliverance* was out of the way, it was [relieved], 'Finally…'".

Where *Deliverance* was as heavy as granite and as intense as a blast furnace, its companion album was stripped down and graceful. Åkerfeldt cites cult Swedish rock band Paatos as a key influence on *Damnation*, specifically their 2001 song *Téa*. Listening to the latter today, its inspiration is difficult to miss.

"It was such a beautiful song, I wanted to tap into that sound," he says. "Basically, I wanted to nick it."

Damnation tracks such as *In My Time Of Need* and *Weakness* were enveloped in hushed atmospherics, while Åkerfeldt and Wilson went heavy on the Mellotron on *Windowpane* and the instrumental *Ending Credits*. "I wanted *Damnation* to be a Mellotron record," says Åkerfeldt. "Steve and I would look at each other and say, 'Should we have some Mellotron on this?' And I'd say, 'Yeah, soak it.'"

The music wasn't the only departure. *Damnation* saw Åkerfeldt dispensing entirely with the death metal growl that was still his default setting to that point, swapping it out for a whispery, clean croon throughout.

"I was shooting for Nick Drake," he says of his gentle vocal approach on *Damnation*. "That shyboy type of voice. I couldn't sing like Ronnie James Dio, unfortunately, but I could do the fragile loner vibe."

As with *Deliverance*, the frontman had little in the way of lyrics for *Damnation* when he started. "I finished the music and the vocal lines, then did the lyrics at the end, hoping for the best," he says. The lyrics he did come up with ran from the introspective to the bleak. He insists they were rooted in the abstract.

"I have a tendency to fabricate stories about the people that I see — the couple walking by, do they have their daughter locked up in the cellar? *Windowpane* came from seeing somebody in the window and just fabricating a story about them, what's going on in their lives. It doesn't amount to anything — there's no, 'Aha, here's the big reveal!'"

Still, many of *Damnation*'s song titles suggest an unhappy mind: *In My Time Of Need*, *Death Whispered A Lullaby*, *Hope Leaves*, *Weakness*. "The lyrics just came from the situation we were in," says Åkerfeldt. "I was pretty miserable when I was writing the lyrics. Detached from everything and anything."

Towards the end of the process of making the two albums, his grandmother sadly died after being hit by a truck. This compounded his despondency.

"We did a photo session right after I got the news," he says. "I could see those photos and, shit, my eyes are just empty. But what could I do? We had this massive project to finish."

Work on the two albums was finished in the autumn of 2002. Despite the pride Åkerfeldt felt at making *Damnation* — "I listened back to it and thought, 'Fucking hell, I sound good'" — he was drained. "I was a wreck, physically and mentally. I wanted to cancel shows, split up the band, all these kind of things."

That didn't happen, of course. Having toured *Deliverance* shortly after its release in late 2002, they returned to the road in North America in July 2003 as support to Porcupine Tree. It was on that tour that they unveiled the songs from *Damnation*. The half-expected push-back from disgruntled metal fans at the idea of Opeth 'selling out' never came.

"That came later, with *Heritage*," he says drily, referring to the band's divisive 2011 album. "Around the time of *Damnation*, it felt like we could do no wrong. Everything we did, people were like [claps admiringly]. By the same token, nobody said, 'It's tremendous that a band that did *Blackwater Park* and those records could have the capability to do a record like *Damnation*.' Nobody gave us that recognition. I was like, 'What the fuck?' I wanted the credit for making an authentic-sounding Mellotron prog record."

He grudgingly concedes the fact that *Damnation* was their first album to chart in the US and UK — admittedly at No.192 and No.181 respectively, but it was a start. "It had no immediate effect on our finances," he says. "We weren't suddenly moving to penthouses."

Still, *Damnation* remains one of Opeth's most beloved albums, and certainly their most accessible (it's no coincidence that it's home to their two most-streamed songs: *Windowpane* and *In My Time Of Need*). While Åkerfeldt bats away the idea that it radically altered the course of the band's career — "We already had those elements in our music" — it did give him the confidence to lean even further into his love of prog on subsequent albums.

"It sounds stupid, but having been involved in the extreme metal scene for so long, *Damnation* felt like we could compete with bands within the prog scene like Porcupine Tree," he says. "It made us feel like we were mature and capable musicians, not just a bunch of fucking metal scum."

Damnation: 20th Anniversary Edition is out now via Music For Nations. See opeth.com for more information.

"It's a bit like No-Man transformed the sound of electro and rave, but from outside the club... There was a sense of being detached from the culture itself. That's what made us outsiders."

Tim Bowness

No-Man in 1990: a band looking for land.

Art School Dancing

One day in 1987, Porcupine Tree founder Steven Wilson met singer-songwriter Tim Bowness. Whether or not the planets were aligned that day, you can determine for yourself, but their subsequent collaborations as **No-Man** would result in some extraordinary and innovative music – as you can find out on their new box set *Housekeeping: The OLI Years 1990-1994*.

Words: Rob Hughes **Images:** No-Man Archives

1987 was a big year for Steven Wilson. Still in his teens, he devised Porcupine Tree as a prog-psych conceit, complete with a fabulously fictional back story. He also happened to meet singer-songwriter Tim Bowness, with whom he began playing as No Man Is An Island (Except For The Isle Of Man). While Porcupine Tree would gradually evolve into a whole other creative entity, the Bowness project was a more immediate priority.

The chemistry was instant. "At our very first recording session, we did three completely different kinds of song," Wilson recalls. "We recorded *Faith's Last Doubt*, which is this very sort of pretentious prog rock epic. Then there was this piece of industrial funk, *Screaming Head Eternal*, and a gothic piano ballad called *Beaten By Love*. And all in the space of about three hours – bang, bang, bang. There was something magical straight away."

"What was great about working with Steven is that we were free from any shackles," Bowness adds. "When I first met him, we'd discuss avant-garde music, classical, prog rock, Swans, David Bowie, all of these things. And we'd draw from spiritual jazz or soul music. Very early on we started using looped beats and looped bass, but we'd also draw samples from Stockhausen and Van der Graaf Generator. Basically, we just wanted to express ourselves."

This wildly eclectic, anything-goes approach made for some thrilling music. No Man Is An Island experimented as a four-piece in their early days, before slimming down to a trio (with violinist Ben Coleman) for 1989's boldly visceral EP *Swagger*. The band name soon lost a little fat, too, becoming simply No-Man. As a sumptuous new box set attests, they were impossible to pigeonhole.

Housekeeping: The OLI Years 1990-1994 includes No-Man's two studio albums for the One Little Indian label (now rebranded as One Little Independent), plus singles compilations, out-takes, alternative versions and BBC radio sessions. In it you'll find everything from nascent trip-hop to classical textures, art-rock to dance music, ambient to industrial, electronica to sweeping prog. Recorded between the last knockings of acid house and the advent of Britpop, these tracks occupy a peculiar space in time.

For all their affiliations with post-rave culture, No-Man remained wilfully outside of it. You'd never catch Wilson or Bowness living it up in clubland. "God, no!" Wilson says, laughing at the thought. "We were the complete antithesis. The best analogy is Brian Wilson writing songs about surfing, when he'd never been near a surfboard in his life. We'd be

Above: the band's home studio, autumn 1993. Above right: a 'blue foliage' photo, part of the *Flowermouth* album artwork, early 1994.

inside with a cup of tea, listening to Talk Talk's *Spirit Of Eden*, rather than going out, taking ecstasy and dancing to some banging techno. That's my idea of hell. We were nerds."

"It's a bit like No-Man transformed the sound of electro and rave, but from outside the club," offers Bowness. "As if we were wandering past, heard an interesting sound, sampled it and did something with it back in our bedrooms. There was a sense of being detached from the culture itself. That's what made us outsiders."

This gave prospective employers a headache: how to classify the unclassifiable. No-Man bounced between labels pre-OLI, choosing to self-release 1990's radical reworking of Donovan's 60s hit *Colours*. Wilson and Bowness stripped back the original's folk elements and gave it a spacey funk-hop makeover, complete with Coleman's classical violin. The effect was remarkable. It proved to be a breakthrough moment.

"At that point, we'd been building up a live audience, playing at places like [London clubs] the Marquee and the Rock Garden," Bowness explains. "But we just couldn't get journalists or record company people there. It was really frustrating. I'd read an article about Happy Mondays saying that their next single was going to be a version of Donovan's *Colours*. So over the weekend I went to Steven's house in Hemel Hempstead and we recorded our own version. It was pure opportunism on our part, but we thought it was a great record. We pressed it up and sent out about five copies with an intentionally ridiculous cover note, making claims that we were the Jesus Christ to Jesus Jones's David Icke. Luckily it reached the right people. We ended up with single of the week in *Melody Maker* and *Sounds*. Everyone was there at our next gig, Manchester Boardwalk: publishing companies, record companies, you name it."

Colours was picked up by Probe Plus, but One Little Indian came calling soon afterwards. *Lovesighs* (1992) brought together various EP tracks and served as a handy No-Man primer, creating a buzz for their debut album proper. *Loveblows & Lovecries — A Confession* was duly released in May 1993.

Marketing No-Man was a whole other matter. Wilson and Bowness brought in Talk Talk manager Keith Aspden to oversee their affairs. "Keith was very, very direct," Bowness recalls. "He said, 'I see you two as the Pet Shop Boys with the potential of Pink Floyd.' Steven and I never wanted to compromise, which made for some crazy conversations with the label. We had a meeting about the video for *Only Baby*, and somebody tried to convince me that green was the colour of pop. They tried to make us wear green costumes in the video. So Steven and I turned up at the shoot wearing all black, with our manager and the record company arguing in the background."

Loveblows & Lovecries had been preceded by a UK tour in which the band swelled to a sextet, thanks to the inclusion of ex-Japan members Mick Karn (bass) Steve Jansen (drums) and

"We'd be inside with a cup of tea, listening to Talk Talk's *Spirit Of Eden*, rather than going out, taking ecstasy and dancing to some banging techno. That's my idea of hell. We were nerds."

Steven Wilson

pretentious, in the best possible sense of the word. We loved tracks that would take you on a journey over 10 minutes. *Painting Paradise* is essentially a piece of dance pop, but it's got the hallmark of conceptual progressive rock music, which we'd grown up listening to."

Flowermouth magnified No-Man's prog credentials. Drummer Jansen and keyboard player Barbieri returned for cameos (the latter having since joined Porcupine Tree), while fresh blood included fusion band Nucleus's trumpeter Ian Carr and King Crimson royalty Robert Fripp and Mel Collins. All three newcomers stamp their presence on the heroic opening track, *Angel Gets Caught In The Beauty Trap*. Fripp, in particular, was a revelation.

"Musically it was fantastic," Bowness remembers. "But it was also a very funny session, because I'd written these 'Obvious Strategies' that I'd given him for each of the tracks, sort of inverting the Oblique Strategies from Eno. We'd go: 'Before you listen to it, we want a little bit of this…' and we'd

***Housekeeping*, the new box set, is out now.**

A backstage photo from a No-Man gig at the Duchess of York in Leeds, October 14, 1992; L-R: Steve Jansen, Ben Coleman, Mick Karn, Richard Barbieri and Steven Wilson.

Richard Barbieri (keyboards). All three subsequently appeared on one of the album's key tracks, *Sweetheart Raw*. Despite its merit, though, and positive reviews, *Loveblows* didn't sell.

One Little Indian slashed the budget for 1994 follow-up *Flowermouth*. No-Man used the money to build their own recording facility in Wilson's parents' house, in his old room. No longer having to watch the clock, and now down to a core duo, they strove to make exactly the kind of album they wanted. The pointer seemed to be the previous record's ambitious mini-epic *Painting Paradise*.

"It's easy to hear that we liked progressive rock," says Wilson. "That's one of the things that separated us out from that era. We liked a lot of other stuff too, but we loved that kind of conceptual scale. And we loved being

have a little photograph of Robert from 1973. Then I might say, 'But we also wouldn't mind a little bit of this…' and it could be anything from Ken Dodd to Rick Wakeman with a cape. I think we cut the pictures out from magazines. It was very instinctive, he was spewing this music out effortlessly.

"On one track he said, 'This is Fripp of the future, you're using Fripp of the past,'" Bowness continues. "He played the solo, and we didn't like it. He said, 'You're wrong.' Steven said, 'This is how wrong we are,' and deleted it, jokingly, in front of him. It was a comic moment, there was no bad feeling. A decade later, Robert was supporting Porcupine Tree. Steven told me that the first thing he said was, 'Ten years ago, I gave you the opportunity to use Fripp of the future and you used Fripp of the past. You were wrong then and you're wrong now!' I loved that he'd remembered that."

Alas, No-Man appeared hopelessly at odds with the times too. *Flowermouth* sold better than its predecessors, but not enough to kick-start their commercial fortunes. Creatively they were unwilling to compromise their vision. The rich intricacies and lush detail of *Flowermouth* proved difficult to translate in the small venues they were used to, the result being that they simply stopped playing live.

"It was actually that same bloody-mindedness again," reasons Bowness, chuckling at the sheer impudence of it.

"It was like, 'We're not going to play until we can find the right venue to justify this music, with the right musicians.' It took 15 years to finally play that kind of venue we wanted. That's my understanding. Also, at that time Steven was doing a lot of gigs with Porcupine Tree, who were building up a large audience."

The upshot was that No-Man and One Little Indian parted ways. The band would go on to enjoy several new chapters (the most recent being 2019's *Love You To Bits*), while Wilson and Bowness have simultaneously carved out successful careers in their own right. But No-Man is always on the agenda somewhere. In fact, Wilson is sure that, current commitments notwithstanding, he and Bowness will do something again in the near future. Bowness thinks "it'd be really nice just to go in with Steven and see what we come up with from nothing. Almost as it was when we first started writing together."

This brings us neatly back to *Housekeeping*. Both men agree that those years documented in the box set map a vital part of their creative and musical development. Wilson admits that he couldn't listen back to this stuff for a good 20 years ("I just couldn't get past the very gauche, naïve production and all of that"), but now believes he and Bowness had something unique.

"There was something innovative and ahead of the curve in what we were doing at the time, mixing dance beats with a very ambitious production and songwriting sensibility," he says.

"Whatever was happening at that time — grunge, Britpop — we never fitted in. But of course, as time goes on, that becomes a strength rather than a weakness. It's what gives your music longevity. Whereas Northside might've been confined to the dustbin of history, I like to think people will still be interested in this No-Man box set 30 years after we made the music. I'm really very proud of it now."

Housekeeping: The OLI Years 1990-1994 is out now via One Little Independent. See no-man.co.uk for more information.

"*Invocation* is quite powerful, it's about the feminine archetype, whereas *Supplication* is almost like a glimpse of a very private moment. So that's where the balance is."

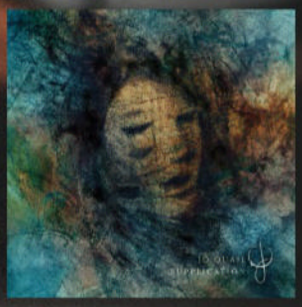
Jo Quail is pushing boundaries in fine prog style.

Hello, I Must Be Bowing

Experimental cellist **Jo Quail** has harnessed primal and spiritual elements in her latest releases, the dual EPs *Invocation* and *Supplication*. Comprising two three-song cycles and the distinctive vocals of Heilung's Maria Franz and O.R.k's Lorenzo Esposito Fornasari, the EPs find *The Cartographer* musician moving into new sonic worlds. Quail shares the story of their creation and reveals her new-found passion for the trombone.

Words: Dom Lawson **Portrait:** Simon Kallas

The stunning *Invocation* and *Supplication* are both out now.



If progressive music is about anything beyond long-winded epics and curry-stained capes, it must be a wide-eyed and persistent disregard for the norm. The greats of the genre all had a desire to push music into new territory, and use any artistic or technical resources that came to hand. The cello-wielding embodiment of that ethos, Jo Quail may not be making traditional prog rock of any kind, but her fearless, questing spirit has won countless admirers from the prog and heavy music communities over the last few years. Her last full release, *The Cartographer*, was a wildly atmospheric orchestral piece that made oblique nods to Rock In Opposition bands Art Zoyd and Univers Zero. Her latest, *Invocation/Supplication* is effectively two distinct collaborations with two singers: Maria Franz of runic renegades Heilung, and Italian producer and composer Lorenzo Esposito Fornasari (or Lef, as Quail calls him). Another immersive and disarming piece of deep left-field, gleefully experimental instrumental music, *Invocation/Supplication* continues the cellist's established tradition of making records that sound like nothing else on Earth.

When *Prog* catches up with Jo Quail via Zoom, she initially seems a bit flustered and murmurs something about "spinning a lot of plates at the moment". Once we begin to discuss *Invocation/Supplication*, all traces of stress disappear from her face, as she explains how Franz and Fornasari's voices ended up on her latest project.

"I've known Maria for years," she explains. "I've met her loads of times, I've supported Heilung, and I've stayed at her house stacks of times, but I'd never actually written for her. It was funny because I wasn't quite brave enough to think that our friendship would extend to her agreeing to sing some songs that I created! Also, she's Maria and she must get 50 million people every day asking her to collaborate or to appear as a guest. I wanted to make it perfect before I presented anything to her, but then I mentioned it to Michael [Berberian] at Season Of Mist Records, bless him, and he went straight in and ran it up the flagpole! I was mortified and very thankful as well! [Laughs.]"

Lorenzo Esposito Fornasari has worked with everyone from Lisa Gerrard and Bill Laswell to King Crimson alumnus Pat Mastelotto and former Porcupine Tree bassist Colin Edwin (in ongoing post-rock crew O.R.k.). He has an extraordinary, ethereal and evocative voice: the perfect match for Quail's amorphous cello explorations.

"The first time I ever met Lef was actually onstage," she says, eyebrows raised in mock surprise. "I was invited onstage to perform

with him, without any rehearsal, so I'd never even said hello to the bloke. But I *knew* him. You know when you have that connection? He was so easy to be with onstage, and after that I was like, 'Jesus, that's one hell of a talented man!' Lef's voice is in the same register as my cello. I was thinking of him when I was working on *Supplication*, thinking very lyrically with the cello. I wanted there to be no space to tell where I ended and Lef began. We have this sort of creative closeness."

Six tracks and 36 minutes deep, *Invocation/Supplication* is the classic game of two halves. In the first, Maria Franz's haunting vocals collide with hypnotic, tribal drums and intertwined tonal surges (*Macha*), waves of queasy, glacial ambience (*Willow Of All*), and profoundly cinematic, orchestral disquiet (*Baroscyre*). In the second, Fornasari's lithe, exotic voice soars across a minimal backdrop of earthy cello drones (*The Calling*), a funeral procession of churning strings (*Maestoso*) and an ululating fog of subterranean bass and ghostly crescendos. Ideally consumed in one disorientating hit, it's a collection of great contrasts and secrets.

"The main differences [between the halves] are that Maria's side, *Invocation*, is quite strident and a very outwards-looking-type thing," she explains. "The orchestration is huge on that one, but Lef's side is much more intimate: the orchestration is much smaller. It's just me and Lef on there, with a little bit from Koen [Kaptjn] on trombone, a snippet here and there. So *Invocation*, for Maria, is quite powerful, it's about the feminine archetype, whereas *Supplication* is almost like a glimpse of a very private moment. So that's where the balance is, although that's just *my* opinion. People are free to interpret this however they wish! [Laughs.] Sometimes I feel like the custodian of something, not the creator. It's very weird, it's like I need to care for this, I need to mind it and make sure it's kept safe and warm."

PRESS/LEON BARKER

Quail feels like the custodian of her own music.

KEVIN ASHBURN

Heilung's Maria Franz: in high demand.

PRESS

Lorenzo Esposito Fornasari, aka Lef, is "one hell of a talented man".

> "I never know how a record's going to be received. *The Cartographer* was like jumping off a cliff, I had no idea what people would think. Same with this one."

While Jo Quail's early releases were hazily defined by her strident cello playing and liberated attitude towards composition, both *Invocation/Supplication* and *The Cartographer* speak of an upgraded creative process that now knows no boundaries or limitations. The cello remains a primary voice throughout the six new pieces, but Franz and Fornasari's vocal efforts, alongside small but telling contributions from several other musicians, play an equally vital role. Interestingly, *Invocation/Supplication* once again finds Quail writing for trombone. Prominently featured in *The Cartographer*, the oft-maligned brass instrument has clearly become a favourite.

"Before I wrote *The Cartographer*, I would've avoided using anything except strings — that's because I didn't understand and had no need or cause to," Quail shrugs. "As far as I was concerned, the trombone [players] were the people that were always too loud and behind me, slightly to the right! [Laughs.] Then I had the fortune to be put in a position where I needed to write for trombone, so I began to learn about the instrument, and what a beautiful, beautiful instrument it is. It occupies the same register that I occupy with the cello, so writing for it, for me, is quite instinctive. It's the texture and the timbre of the instrument that I love."

Originally conceived as two separate, single-song collaborations, *Invocation/Supplication* steadily became much more, as Jo Quail plunged head first into a world of unique and stunning voices, meticulous sound design and shape-shifting trombones. Some significant time after recording it, she notes that the end result completely surpassed her original goals.

"When I write music, I don't set out with any specific intention; I never have. I didn't set out with a plan to create what I did with Maria and Lef. I just wanted to make a landscape for each of those voices. But their voices are wild enough to have gone in any direction they chose, so the whole thing was easy really! [Laughs.]"

With no specific destination in mind, Quail's music honours prog's adventurous spirit, while also highlighting the incalculable importance of the unprecedented and the unpredictable in music. Permanently on the edge of being overwhelmed by her own creativity, her desire to always create something new, and to connect with like-minded music explorers along the way, is something to be cherished. Just watch out for low-flying spinning plates.

"I never know how a record's going to be received," she concludes. "*The Cartographer* was like jumping off a cliff, I had no idea what people would think. Same with this one. With the greatest respect, it doesn't matter to people who is on it, whether it's the milkman or Lef or anybody else — if they don't like the music, they don't like it. But they *have* liked it and it has resonated with people, and that's inspiring and a little bit frightening. I could be wrong, but I don't think I've made the same album twice, so my anxiety is always about what I'm going to do next!"

Invocation and Supplication are out now via By Norse. See www.joquail.co.uk for more information.

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Work To The Rhythm

Six decades into his career, **Trevor Horn** has finally released a third album under his own name. *Echoes – Ancient & Modern* finds the musician and superproducer infuse a second collection of reimagined pop songs with his magic. He discusses reworking 80s anthems with Steve Hogarth and Robert Fripp, the Yes years and why he loves nothing more than making mischief.

Words: Johnny Sharp **Portrait:** Solar Jupiter Photography

"I saw King Crimson a couple of years ago and I'd never heard such expertly orchestrated chaos in my life!"

"I always try to put two things together that don't normally fit," says Trevor Horn by way of trying to sum up a hugely diverse career as producer, musician and songwriter. That would explain the latest release to bear his name, which sees a number of curious marriages of artists and repertoire on a new album of covers.

Who else would commission Toyah Willcox and her prog-aristocrat husband Robert Fripp to tackle Frankie Goes To Hollywood's *Relax*? Or persuade Rick Astley to take on Yes's 1980s prog-pop chartbuster, *Owner Of A Lonely Heart*? Elsewhere, Steve Hogarth offers his reading of The Cars' haunting, Live Aid-associated lament *Drive*, alongside numerous other curious match-ups.

It's a convenient jumping-off point from which to discuss a career that has been reliably unpredictable. He may be best-known to most as the producer who helped define the 80s with a string of ingeniously engineered pop releases — while wearing none-more-80s horn-rimmed specs — but he also played a notable cameo role in the history of prog as singer, then producer, of Yes.

The now 74-year-old Horn's new project is *Echoes — Ancient & Modern*, something of a follow-up to his 2019 set *Trevor Horn Reimagines The Eighties*, which also featured Hogarth among the line-up and also included a take on *Owner...*, on that occasion with Horn on the mic. The impetus behind it was Deutsche Grammophon.

Bow down, ye folks, to one of the world's most successful producers.

"We were talking about doing an acoustic record," Horn explains. "But then I thought, there's plenty of other people that can make boring acoustic records, and I don't need to join them. So I went back to do what I normally do, and although quite a few of the songs start out quite sparse, they then build up into something else."

A case in point being his bossa nova-tinged reimagining of Joe Jackson's jazz-inflected 1982 synthpop hit *Steppin' Out*, with Horn's old protégé Seal fronting a less urgent affair than the original. "The original is very fast," Horn says. "A bit like: 'You've just done a line of blow and you're going out in New York.' This new version is more like: 'You just took some magic mushrooms and are going out in LA.'"

More radical overhauls ensue, such as Tori Amos's repurposing of Kendrick Lamar's *Swimming Pools* and Lady Blackbird's loungey torch-song interpretation of Grace Jones's *Slave To The Rhythm*. But it's Toyah and Fripp's camp strut through *Relax* that's probably the most startling moment, the result of Horn's approach of 'if it ain't broke, fix it anyway and see what happens'. "At least it's different, you know?" he says. "And I love Fripp's guitar solo on it."

As a long-time Yes fan, was he also a Crimson devotee in his formative years? "I really liked *In The Court Of The Crimson King*, and I liked *Starless And Bible Black* and *Red*, I bought both of those. Then, probably like a lot of people, I lost track of them for a while. But then I saw them a couple of years ago and I'd never heard such expertly orchestrated chaos in my life!

"I've got a lot of respect for Robert Fripp," he adds, "because when he goes out on the road with his band, he really looks after them. And that's quite a rarity for artists to be so considerate to their musicians."

And there we were, imagining Fripp to be a schoolmasterly presence conducting his charges with ruthless precision, the prog answer to James Brown, rapping his band's knuckles for the slightest hint of a bum note…

Horn grins. "You're confusing him with Roger Waters."

OK, then. The storied producer's appreciation of Steve Hogarth, who fronts *Drive* on this album and tackled Joe Jackson's *It's Different For Girls* on *Trevor Horn Reimagines The Eighties*, has been a recent development.

"My girlfriend's a big Marillion fan, and I've grown to like them too," he reveals. "I'm kind of a connoisseur of voices and I think Steve's got a great one. He's also a lovely fella. I think one of the reasons Marillion are still going is because of him."

The presence of *Owner Of A Lonely Heart* on both those albums is a reflection of its prominent place on Horn's CV. The version of the track sung by Rick Astley is a relatively faithful rendition of the song, but the original was a masterpiece of progressive pop, even if its birth was a traumatic one to say the least.

PRESS/TREVOR HORN ARCHIVES

Above: Horn in his element at a desk. Above right: receiving some 'instant gratification' on stage.

BRIGITTE ENGL/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Horn with Chris Squire at the Produced By Trevor Horn show, November 11, 2004.

By that time, though, Horn had earned the respect of the band, after having previously been a full member — frontman, in fact, for a faintly surreal spell. After he and Geoff Downes shot to brief fame as the Buggles via their deathless 1979 chart-topper *Video Killed The Radio Star*, the manager they shared with Yes, Brian Lane, had the startling idea of the pair replacing Jon Anderson and Rick Wakeman in the band after the latter two had walked out during early studio sessions for *Drama* in March 1980.

As it turned out, it was something of a youthful dream come true. A bass player by trade, Horn had long been in awe of Chris Squire in particular.

"I thought he came up with more original bass lines than any other player. The first time I met him was pretty memorable. He was so big, like 6'5" or something. And he had a way of talking, kiiiind of liiike thiis… and I thought, 'Oh my God! Is he thick?' Of course, I was totally wrong. It was just a way he had of disarming people."

Although the newcomer held his own creatively in the band, he always felt daunted by stepping up to the same mic as his predecessor. "Jon Anderson's a hell of a singer, you know? He must have a range beyond mine in terms of being able to get up there [into the higher registers]. Still, it was one of the great experiences of my life. And what a moment, being in a rehearsal room and listening to Alan White, Chris Squire and Steve Howe play close up. I never heard anything like it. I mean, the intensity of it…"

Contrary to some accounts (Rick Wakeman once quoted Chris Squire as having told him it was "an absolute

"I thought Chris Squire came up with more original bass lines than any other player. The first time I met him was pretty memorable. He was so big, like 6'5" or something."

PRESS/TREVOR HORN ARCHIVES

DAWN FLETCHER-PARK/SOPA IMAGES/SHUTTERSTOCK

WENN RIGHTS LTD/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Above: on stage with Toyah Willcox at Cropredy, 2022. Below: singing with Chris Braide in 2008.

nightmare from start to finish" due to their fans' adverse reactions), Horn doesn't remember receiving much flak.

"I think people were reasonably accepting. I think they understood that I was the price that they had to pay, you know, to hear the band they loved. So they put up with me. I mean, they're a pretty civilised lot, Yes fans. It's not like you're joining the Sex Pistols!"

Yes splintered further after the tour, with Downes and Howe leaving to form Asia. Meanwhile, Horn met the increasing demand for his services as an innovative producer, helping to sculpt post-modern pop par excellence with Dollar and ABC while also mentoring a new Liverpool band called Frankie Goes To Hollywood, signed to his own label ZTT.

Around the same time, though, he was working with the band renamed Cinema by Squire and Alan White, who had now hooked up with South African guitarist Trevor Rabin and original Yes keyboard player Tony Kaye. And when Jon Anderson returned to the fold and they readopted the Yes name, Horn retained a significant creative input.

"I would never have been able to have the input I had as producer on *90125* if I hadn't previously been in the band," he says now. "They kept trying *not* to do *Owner Of A Lonely Heart* and then one day, when I got to the studio, there was a deputation waiting for me saying, 'We've all decided that we're *not doing it*.'

"I got on my hands and knees on the floor, pulled at everybody's trouser legs and made a noise and shouted, 'Pleeease pleeease, please have one more go. Let me programme the drums! It's got to be simple. It's just got to go, *"Boom, chick, boom boom, boom boom"*, it can't go [imitates more complex drumbeat] *"doo de doop dook doop, doo dook, chick chick doop boof…"*' like everything we'd been trying. I made such a fuss, saying, 'I only took this album because you said you'd do this single!'

"They were so embarrassed — and maybe amused at the same time — by my display that eventually, they grudgingly agreed to have one more go. This time, programming it. I could never have done that if I hadn't been in the band.

"At the time I took that job on I was probably one of the most successful producers in the world. And I would never have worked with Yes again if I hadn't loved them, because they were a pain in the neck! But, when I listen to that record now, I am so glad I did it because they were also fuckin' brilliant, you know? Alan [White], the drummer, all that stuff he did with the samples in the middle of *Owner Of A Lonely Heart*. A talented musician is a talented musician, it doesn't matter if he's on a sampler or a fucking banjo. And they were great, Chris and Alan. Trevor Rabin was no slouch either, he played all the keyboards and all the guitars."

That wasn't the end of the conflict that surrounded that landmark single — Horn walked out on the project for around six weeks in a stand-off over a snare sound in the final mix, until legendary producer Ahmet Ertegun stepped in on his side and demanded the band reinstate Horn's version.

But that's a story for another day. Fast-forward to the present day, and while we await the verdict of Horn's former bandmates on Rick Astley's version of *Owner…*, another guest from the prog world who is set to feature on a bonus track on forthcoming expanded editions of the album is King Crimson's Jakko Jakszyk. He takes on Visage's 1980 synthpop noir classic *Fade To Grey*.

"We changed it quite drastically," is all Horn will say about that one, joking, "because the original was quite sketchy, you know."

Meanwhile, the musician in Trevor Horn still keeps his hand in. The band he formed as Producers in 2006 with Lol Creme and initially Chris Braide, which made 2012's very tidy prog pop album *Made In Basing Street*, is now The Trevor Horn Band, and Horn tells *Prog* that the LP is to be reissued at some point this year.

"We're talking about maybe doing a couple of shows together. I've got to try and persuade Lol…"

He has also toured recently with tribute act Dire Straits Legacy, and admits that being onstage is a very different thrill to the buzz he gets from his studio work.

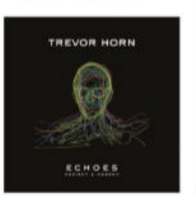
"Performing is like instant gratification," he says. "You have total control in the studio; live, it's a car crash and when it actually works it feels kind of like a minor miracle."

He even opened for Seal recently alongside erstwhile Yes colleague Geoff Downes as Buggles, and in their set was *Owner Of A Lonely Heart* and Horn's Art Of Noise hit *Close To The Edit*. That title's reference to his former band was probably lost on pop-pickers in the 80s. But that's Horn all over.

"I like to make a bit of mischief sometimes," he says with a grin.

You can take the boy out of prog.

The new album, *Echoes – Ancient & Modern*.



Echoes — Ancient & Modern is out now via Deutsche Grammophon. See trevorh.lnk.to/echoes for more information.

The many shades of Pallas.

Sonic Odyssey

Its mood consistently dark and ominous, with songs about climate change, disinformation and the reigniting of the Cold War, **Pallas**'s latest album, *The Messenger*, is certainly far from easy listening. Only their eighth album in their 48 years, it was also – as usual – far from being a rush job.

Words: Dave Ling **Images:** Mike Bentley

There's sluggish, there's long-winded, there's slow, there's languid and unhurried. Then there's the speed at which Pallas seem to operate, which can best be described as glacial.

Prog's correspondent has just taken his life into his hands by voicing this theory to the veteran Scottish neo-proggers. Fortunately, they erupt with laughter before addressing the truth behind our statement.

"We take a long time to do anything," says a smiling Ronnie Brown, "and then quite often we'll go back and do them all over again. I don't think we will *ever* do anything quickly. We've turned messing around and going down alleys into an art form."

"No, we're not the fastest-moving group of individuals," Alan Reed says, nodding in agreement. "But having said that, cutting the tracks was done quite quickly. Once I rejoined, that kick-started things a little."

"By our standards this album has been quite quick," Graeme Murray continues. "Five years. For us that's lightning speed."

"The bottom line is that with Pallas, things take as long as they take," says Brown. "If we'd set ourselves a deadline of making it in five years, it could have been another five years."

Apologies for labouring the point, but it's worth making: Pallas are reminded that the studio album we have met over Zoom to discuss, *The Messenger*, is just their eighth in their 48-year history, which dates all the way back to the mid-70s. The statement causes Murray to grasp his head in his hands theatrically, before retorting: "Aye, but let's be positive – at least we're all still here. And I can assure people that the album is well worth the wait."

"By our standards this album has been quite quick – five years. For us that's lightning speed."

Graeme Murray

Vocalist Reed and keyboard-player Brown are in Aberdeen. Murray has also returned to his native Scotland after a lengthy period down south. Although the singer has been back in the line-up for just under two years, given the unseemly manner of his second exit from Pallas in 2010, which was accompanied by strong words from both sides of the divide, seeing them all together again feels slightly odd.

"I was bounced into doing this album…" Reed begins, by way of explanation.

"We locked him in a cupboard – literally!" interjects Murray, grinning.

In fact it was Mike Stobbie, a keyboard player with two different spells in Pallas, who played matchmaker.

Latest album, *The Messenger*.

"I'd washed my hands of the band long ago," Reed says. "I went out for a drink with Mike, who filled me in on what was going on up there: they were working on an album. But of course I'd heard that tale many times before."

"We're *always* working on an album," Murray adds.

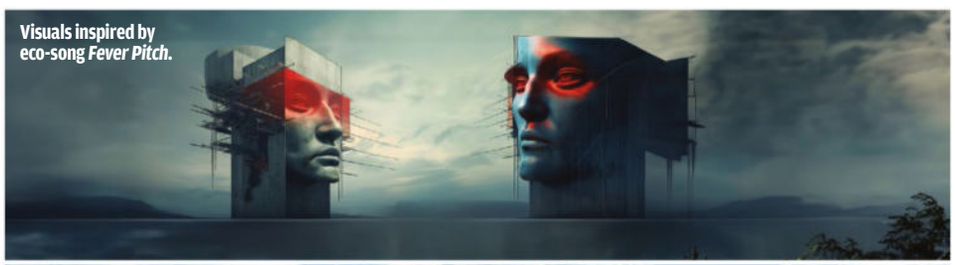
"Several pints into our drinks, Mike asked me: 'Why don't you rejoin Pallas?'" Reed recalls. "To which I replied: 'No, no, no.' There was a whole series of reasons why I wouldn't do that. It was when Mike said, 'What if the other guys had all changed?' that the idea became easier to consider. The next thing I knew, Mike had Graeme on his phone. Basically, I'd been set up.

"I woke up the following morning and wondered, 'Did I just rejoin Pallas?'" the singer says, smiling. "A few days later I was due to be in Scotland

anyway, so I came up and we had a summit. And I found it *was* easier to get on with them.

"I heard the demos of the material, which was very dark and also extremely strong, typically Pallas. It was clear there was a great album there. So we got Niall [Mathewson, guitarist], who now lives in Cambodia, via FaceTime and went over the issues that needed to be addressed. We found that despite everything that happened in the past we *could* get on again."

Which brings us to the question of what happened to Paul Mackie, the singer who put in a good shift with Pallas on their previous two albums, *XXV* and *Wearewhoweare* in 2011 and 2014? Did he leave?



Visuals inspired by eco-song *Fever Pitch*.

Clowns to the right: *Sign Of The Times*.

The Nine offers an eyeful.

"Nobody leaves this band," Brown deadpans. "Pallas is a family. No, I'm being serious. We could call upon Paul at any time. Right now Paul is not actively contributing, but there's no acrimony. Euan [Lowson, the band's original singer] is still involved behind the scenes. Mike Stobbie clearly is."

Although 'issues' blew up when Reed last departed Pallas — a few uncomfortable things were said about geography, with the singer being based down south causing them to doubt his commitment — there was no awkwardness around his return.

"Once we'd decided that we were going to make an album, working together brought a real buzz of excitement," Murray insists. "In fact we've just been watching some rushes of a video made by Mike Bentley [the man behind the scenes who makes Pallas tick] and we're all blown away. The visuals that accompany the music are truly incredible."

This latest burst of activity from Pallas can be traced back to a 2018 Facebook post from Murray in which the bassist cryptically stated that the band were "not dead but in a state of suspended animation", and closed with the prediction: "The patient may [yet] come back to life."

"That's right," he confirms. "It was high time we got off our arses and did something."

Mathewson living overseas was among the numerous hurdles that needed to be overcome.

"Making the album remotely was quite a challenge, no doubt about it," says Murray. "In theory it's easy, but in practice it's far better to have everybody in the room playing and making judgements. Ronnie has done a huge amount of work on this album."

"I'll agree with that," says Reed. "I hadn't worked with Ronnie directly before as much as I did this time. Normally I do my vocals and they add stuff around it, but the way we worked this time was much, much more of a group effort than on previous albums. In many ways that has caused us all to get on a lot better."

> **"I'd been set up. I woke up the following morning and wondered: 'Did I just rejoin Pallas?'"**
> **Alan Reed**

There's no doubt that Pallas's teamwork has served to create an album rich in detail and full of intricacy — although, as Reed stated earlier, its mood is consistently dark and ominous. With songs about climate change, disinformation and the resurrection of the Cold War, lamenting (as the record's biography states) "the seeming inability of our leaders to do anything but pour fuel on the flames", *The Messenger* is about as far from easy listening as it's possible to get.

"The songs address various different subjects, including a lot of stuff that's current just now," Brown says in agreement. "The Ukraine war inspired it a lot, though it's not specifically about that. It's really about the fact that we are being fed lies."

"One song, *The Great Attractor*, has a cameo from Donald Trump," Murray adds, his facial expression betraying his contempt for the former US President. That'll be the song with lyrics: '*The hate attractor, the great distractor/ Now he's gone, please don't ever come back*'?

"It could just as easily be about Boris Johnson," Reed says.

Pallas remain watchful – nobody ever leaves.

There's no mistaking the subject matter of *Fever Pitch*, which warns of '*hiding from the sun that burns*' and '*promised rain that never comes*', an ode to our planet '*crying out in pain*'.

"It's not a futuristic thing," says Reed. "As we were recording the album, global warming became worse. That's a serious problem that's on top of us all right now, as we speak."

"We've had weeks of flooding up here in the north of Scotland," says Murray. "Rain, rain, day and night. It's not natural."

Brown adds, "*Fever Pitch* ends with people overlooked by a red sky and being pushed into the sea because they've nowhere else to go, as we watch the fires raging."

The Nine goes a stage further still, with the human race '*suffering its final fall from grace*'.

"That one is probably my favourite on the album," Reed reveals proudly, "because it's full of unpleasant images that form in your head and just won't go away. It was influenced by Ukraine."

"Though it's not specific to Ukraine," Brown insists. "It's just that the war was going on during the writing."

Although a common mood of deep sombreness unites the songs, *The Messenger* isn't a concept album. "No. Every track is about something different, there isn't a real consistent thread between them," Brown says. "For instance, *The Messenger* is an environmental song."

At 13 minutes long and bringing the album to a close, *The Messenger* is, in fact, the album's epic swansong.

"You've got to have one of those," a beaming Murray says. "You've just got to do it."

"They're all quite long songs, actually," Reed notes. "There's only six on the album."

On the lighter side of things, and there *are* interludes of brightness. For example nine-minute opener *Sign Of The Time*s welds some pleasing Jon Anderson-style choral moments to lyrics about another malaise in this society of ours, namely that everybody craves things they can't possibly have.

"Guilty as charged," Brown says, owning up to the Yes influence. "And you've nailed what the song is about."

"I've never really sung like that before," Reed admits cheerfully, "but I'm very pleased with the way the song came out."

Having flitted around various record companies, including EMI's Harvest imprint for 1984's *The Sentinel* and '86's *The Wedge*, to InsideOutMusic and Mascot, Pallas are self-releasing *The Messenger*. "There would be no point in involving a label because, with the best will in the world, the money isn't really there," Reed points out. "It's better that we take a larger slice of a cake that's all our own than a smaller slice of another."

Although the unlikely return of Reed has undoubtedly helped them make an excellent album, Mathewson's continued presence in Cambodia means that Pallas are now essentially a studio-only band.

"We've discussed the possibility of playing live again, but obviously the finance side makes things difficult," Reed sighs. "Also, Graeme would need to become match-fit again after some medical issues."

"Playing live again probably isn't out of the question, though it's not something that I particularly want to do," Ronnie Brown admits. "I don't see any reason why they couldn't bring in somebody to cover for me, but it's a discussion we'd have to have. All the same, I really don't like the thought of sitting here and saying there will be no more live dates from Pallas."

"The best reply to that question," Reed says, smiling helpfully, "is to go with: 'Never say never.'"

The Messenger is out now via Bandcamp. See pallasofficial.com for more information.

“WE DIDN’T SEE A FUTURE BEING IN A BAND!”

After they released 2020’s *Rise Radiant* into a world in facing the unknown, **Caligula’s Horse** began to question their existence as a band. However – despite creative uncertainty and line-up changes – the Aussie prog rockers persisted to make their heaviest and most ambitious material. Guitarist Sam Vallen tells *Prog* about *Charcoal Grace*’s black heart.

Words: Matt Mills
Portrait: Jack Venables

A picture's worth a thousand words. It's a cliché we've all heard too many times in our lives. However, when the artwork for the new Caligula's Horse album, *Charcoal Grace*, is compared to that of its 2020 predecessor, *Rise Radiant*, readers will see everything they need to know about the Aussie prog quartet's last four years.

Rise Radiant's cover was a lavish, colourful painting. Crammed with springtime imagery from deer to flowing water and emerald grass, it was created at a time when, as guitarist Sam Vallen phrases it, the band had "all their ducks in a row". Then the pandemic happened. Now, *Charcoal Grace* is jet-black; flora and fauna are replaced by a human face distorted and washing away into nothingness. It's a pretty surefire sign that some morale has been bludgeoned to death.

"It seems like a kind of dark way to begin this conversation but, around 2020 or 2021, we didn't really see a future being in a band," Vallen explains at the start of his video call with *Prog*. He's talking to us from his home in Brisbane.

"I don't know if you remember, but we saw a tonne of bands break up in that time — obviously, this was not an experience that was unique to us in any way. We had this view from the top of the world, which was immediately cut off into nothing, which is depressing enough, but then we also had this push that a lot of bands had. There was this external motivation to rebook tours six months ahead, make plans that are probably not going to happen. It required all this creative energy and felt like it was for nothing."

Before the pandemic, Caligula's Horse were one of the most prolific acts in progressive music. Vallen co-founded it as a project with vocalist Jim Grey in 2011; they released their debut, *Moments From Ephemeral City*, later the same year and, between that point and 2020, put out new albums within three years of one another. The band even found the space to tour with such genre icons as Mastodon, Opeth and Sleepmakeswaves in between. Following a record deal with InsideOutMusic in 2015 (home to Dream Theater, Devin Townsend and Jethro Tull), everything was going the right way — and then, nothing...

"I have to be careful how I frame [the band's lives during the pandemic],"

Caligula's Horse, L-R: Dale Pinsse, Jim Grey, Josh Griffin, Sam Vallen.

"The question was, 'Why are we in a band?' And the answer was, 'Because we love writing music with one another.'"

Vallen says. "You saw the deaths in Italy and even New York City early on, while we in Australia — this little island that we live on — were basically immune to that. We went into some of the most severe lockdowns in the world, unable to do anything whatsoever, but I feel like it would be in bad taste to suggest that our experience was any worse than anywhere else."

Vallen's being diplomatic. For *Prog* in London, our call is taking place at the sociable hour of 10.30am, but it's currently 8.30pm in Brisbane. The guitarist admits his brain is "fried" at the end of a long working day, which has also included parenting his young son, and he speaks carefully to avoid saying anything too dramatic or sensational. We also know he's being diplomatic because the lyrics on *Charcoal Grace* (like its artwork) paint a far more evocative and traumatic picture of the past few years.

Caligula's Horse say that *Charcoal Grace* isn't a concept album, but its songs all relate to the tribulations of the pandemic, even if tangentially — and they're all pretty bleak. Lead single *Golem* is about struggling with hope when lockdowns were ending only to ramp up again, repeatedly. '*I'm on my knees at the end to beg for that feeling again*,' Grey sings, before depressingly replying to himself: '*Sling hope around your neck*.'

Meanwhile, the album's centrepiece — the four-part, 24-minute *Charcoal Grace* itself — challenges the virtue of forgiveness and candidly unpicks how child abuse survivors deal with trauma as they grow up. '*Hit me again and I'll spit out the blood of your saints!*' *Charcoal Grace IV, Give Me Hell*, angrily declares. Vallen also likens the suite's lyrics to an exploration of relationships amid the pandemic.

"One big element is the idea of the people who had relationships fall apart, before or during the pandemic," the guitarist says. "It was a time where people, especially a lot of the older generation, were dying. How do people deal with the forgiveness of parents, loved ones or even old foes when there's that shift?"

To accompany that darkness, *Charcoal Grace* also contains the heaviest, densest music Caligula's Horse have ever unloaded. *Golem* is a tightly packed progressive metal anthem, defined by Grey's flighty, gorgeous voice clashing with the impactful rhythm section and Vallen's fast-fingered riffing.

That said, the album is also the band's most progressive. There's that central, multipart suite of a title track at its heart, which rises from spacious compositions and clean guitar tones to cathartic, complex aggression. Opening track *The World Breathes With Me* fills 10 minutes with its slowly rising introduction, followed by a host of soulful solos from Vallen: the guitarist's ability to pull shimmering melodies out of the most callus-shredding technicality has made him one of the most distinct players in modern prog. Later, *Mute* goes on to conclude the album as a 12-minute behemoth, endowed with flute passages and post-rock-like crescendos.

It's all the polar opposite to the more direct, uplifting *Rise Radiant* — and, says Vallen, that progressive scope was not explicitly planned. "The assumption from the beginning was that we weren't going to be able to avoid it," he remembers. "There are probably two reasons why: one would be that we try to avoid repeating ourselves, and the punchy, concise *Rise Radiant* approach wouldn't make sense a second time. The second is that the darker and more thoughtful themes required more rumination and more space."

Caligula's Horse — then composed of Vallen, Grey, co-guitarist Adrian Goleby, bassist Dale Prinsse and drummer Josh Griffin — put starting a follow-up to *Rise Radiant* off for months. Although the album came out in May 2020 (weeks after the lockdowns came into effect), the band avoided re-entering writing mode. They instead waited, hoping for the chance to properly promote their then-latest release on the road. But with that came a serious downside: these prolific creatives could suddenly not create.

"A lot of our identity is tied up in the experience of touring," Vallen explains. "This is something that Jim felt even

PRESS/ANDREW BASSO

The unsettling artwork for *Charcoal Grace*.

more acutely. I stayed busy with a lot of things, but he was very concentrated around that. All of a sudden, he’s a singer in a band, I’m a guitarist in a band, but I’m sitting at home and trying to make sure my incredibly bored son can go for his one designated walk a day.”

The pressure and tedium of staying in isolation — scheduling tours, cancelling them, rescheduling tours, re-cancelling them — eventually broke Goleby. The guitarist’s exit was announced to fans on social media in July 2021. The band have since continued as a four-piece and have no plans to replace him.

“I don’t have to be diplomatic about this one,” says Vallen, “because Adrian and I are still great friends. He felt the same stasis and pressure that the rest of us did, but he was someone whose creative input in the band wasn’t particularly great. He was a guitarist foremost and he was great in that role. When I started writing *Charcoal Grace*, admittedly after he left, I felt liberated, and he wouldn’t have had the chance to feel that.”

After Goleby’s departure, the need to create among the members of Caligula’s Horse only grew more and more intense. Vallen says that, by that point, the remaining musicians “weren’t really sure if we could keep being a band — it was very hard to be intrinsically motivated to remain in this ensemble.”

Vallen, Grey, Prinsse and Griffin had to rediscover what it was that made them want to play together to begin with. So, the four organised a series of what the guitarist retrospectively describes as “desperate meetings”. If they couldn’t agree on what they needed, what made them love what they do, the unit may very easily have imploded.

“We asked, ‘What are we doing? What are we getting out of this?’” remembers Vallen, “and we all came to the same answer. The question was, ‘Why are we in a band?’ And the answer was, ‘Because we love writing music with one another.’”

The guitarist elaborates: “We all realised that we were getting caught up in a lot of external things. We were getting caught up in this pressure to try and keep the touring plans alive, even though that was killing us. There was a realisation that the only thing that we absolutely get from this, the only thing that Caligula’s Horse always gives us, is that creative outlet.”

Thanks to its sheer scale and unapologetically honest lyrics, *Charcoal Grace* is the most unabashed statement of that creativity yet. And, happily, the period around its release has once again seen Caligula’s Horse get their ducks in a row — four years after the pandemic first wreaked havoc.

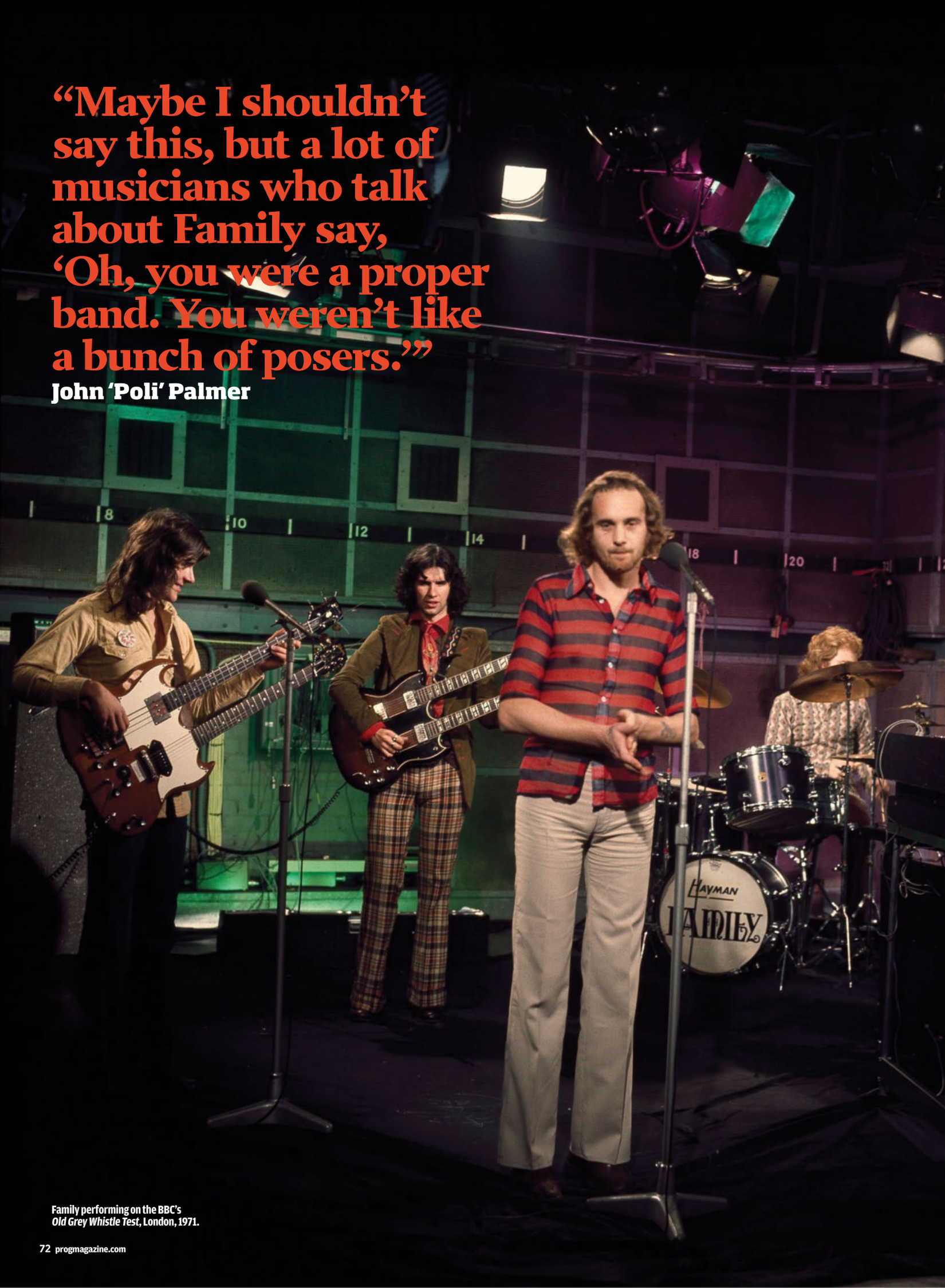
Five days after the album’s January release, the band embarked on a tour of the US and Canada. Vallen says that the remainder of 2024 will similarly be dedicated to letting him and his cohorts reclaim their road warrior status.

“It was fun to be in this band again as soon as we started writing,” he adds, “but I think there was a real change around the first couple of tours that we did [after the pandemic]. In 2022, we did an Australian tour, and by then we were already scheduling the European shows we did a few months back now. Rekindling the creative element was amazing, but it was another thing to reconnect with fans after two, three, four years away.”

Through all the turmoil of the past four years, as well, Vallen believes he’s finally found the answer to the crisis he mentioned at the start of our interview: what does the future of Caligula’s Horse look like?

“We’re definitely not a band who’s ever going to repeat *Charcoal Grace*,” the guitarist answers. “We’re always a band that goes back to the drawing board, so it’s safe to say that whatever we do next will be just as distinct. We’ve just made a truly dark record, but it’s a dark record that’s framed around the idea of leaving that darkness behind. Hopefully it can be cathartic for all of our listeners, as well. The kind of dark cloud that everyone felt during Covid, that’s no longer something we need to be immersed in.”

Charcoal Grace is out now via InsideOutMusic. See caligulashorse.com for more information.



“Maybe I shouldn’t say this, but a lot of musicians who talk about Family say, ‘Oh, you were a proper band. You weren’t like a bunch of posers.’”

John ‘Poli’ Palmer

Family performing on the BBC’s *Old Grey Whistle Test*, London, 1971.

One of the great and most original progressive bands of the late 60s/early 70s, **Family** were an influence on so many groups that came along after them. Fifty-two years after its release, *Prog* talks to Roger Chapman and Poli Palmer about one of their best albums, *Bandstand*.

Words: Mike Barnes **Image:** Michael Putland/Getty Images

Strange Band

"We weren't trying to sound different, we just *were* different," vocalist Roger Chapman says about his former group, Family. And while never a vehicle for double concept albums or displays of flashy virtuosity, Family were one of the first and among the most open-minded of the late-60s/early-70s progressive rock groups, mixing songcraft with a multitude of styles, from jazz to soul, to heavier rock forms, to folk, classical and Eastern influences. They were also a dynamic live act, with Chapman a particularly intense frontman. In a time when musically different was embraced by the record-buying public, all this contributed to a series of UK Top 40 albums and singles before Family's dissolution in 1973.

John 'Poli' Palmer had a background in jazz drumming. He'd had spells with Blossom Toes and folk-rock band Eclection before joining Family in 1969, playing flute, keyboards and vibes. Looking back, what does he think of Family's position in the 70s progressive-rock milieu?

"We used to get on with a lot of the other guys, but any [musical] kinship was probably more with bands like Traffic than Yes," Palmer says. "Maybe I shouldn't say this, but a lot of musicians who talk about Family say, 'Oh, you were a proper band. You weren't like a bunch of posers.' There was no thought of what you called it. We all came from different areas of music and thought whatever sounded good to our earholes would probably sound good to other people. We were naïve as that, really."

Family formed in 1966, having come up through the Leicester rock'n'roll scene as The Farinas and The Roaring Sixties, and in 1968 released their debut album, the post-psychedelic, proto-prog masterpiece *Music In A Doll's House*, produced by Traffic's Dave Mason, and Jimmy Miller.

When Palmer joined Family he was known by his school nickname 'Poli' to differentiate him from namesakes John 'Charlie' Whitney (guitar) and John 'Willy' Weider (bass and violin). When John Wetton replaced Weider in 1971, a nickname was required. Wetton refused to reveal his middle name, but his bandmates found it out by looking at his passport.

"So we called him 'Kenneth', and he hated it," Palmer recalls, laughing at the memory.

"Besides his obviously serious capabilities as a bass player, John was a very warm, really nice chap," says Chapman. "A great musician, a really good singer, and he played a bit of fiddle. He suited Family down to the ground."

Bandstand, Family's sixth album, was recorded in the summer of 1972 at Olympic Studios in London and co-produced by the band and George Chkiantz. "George had been involved with Family right from *Doll's House*, as a tape op," Chapman explains. "He became like a sixth member of the band."

Burlesque, *Bandstand*'s first single, was released with the album in September 1972 and reached No.13. One of Family's best-loved songs, it's based on Wetton and drummer Rob Townsend's strutting, funky groove, with Chapman's voice snaking around the spaces and answering Whitney's guitar lines – some of which Palmer doubles up on synth. It sounds like it might've been born from a jam, but, like the majority of the songs on the album, was composed by Whitney and Chapman. Chapman's lyrics describe him *'heading out west, down to The Burlesque'* in search of good

***Bandstand*: reissued and out now.**

times (a companion to *Sat'd'y Night Barfly* from 1971's *Fearless* album). The titular Burlesque was a club, situated in a converted shop in Leicester and run by a friend of the group.

"In about '66, '67, we'd get a gig in Blackpool or Preston, or even Newcastle, and go back and do the all-nighter there," says Chapman. "It was serious stuff. Even on nights off I'd go down there, get stoned, have a dance, spend the night socialising."

One of the song's more mysterious lines is: *'Got all my cards in one shoe.'* What does it mean?

"I played chemin de fer as an amateur gambler," Chapman explains. "The dealers have what they call a shoe, and he'd collect all the cards and put them in it. So it means 'I've got everything.' I've often wondered if other people knew what the fuck I was talking about!"

"I've often wondered if other people knew what the fuck I was talking about!"

Roger 'Chappo' Chapman

By complete contrast, *My Friend The Sun*, the second single from the album, is an acoustic baroque folk song sung with disarming tenderness by Chapman. Palmer adds an instrument that was generally absent from the 70s keyboard wizard's arsenal: the Woolworth's organ.

"When you plugged it in it had a motor that blew the reeds," Palmer explains. "It's a bit like a harmonium without pedalling it. But the bloody thing would only last a little while and would then go dreadfully out of tune. So when we did a tour we brought half a dozen of them in flight cases."

Palmer explains that Family's approach to recording could range from playing the song live, to building it up to include "everything but the kitchen sink". And some instrument swapping might take place.

"We didn't go, 'Right, that's your job', we'd say, 'Why don't you have a go?'" Palmer explains. "On *Glove* I played organ and Charlie played piano. Charlie would never say he was a pianist, but he had that simplicity, and I would probably have over-thought it. I'd play anything that came around. I can remember playing solos on Stylophone."

There was also an element of spontaneity and serendipity in their decision-making.

"Olympic was a converted cinema. Studio One was where the seats had been, and the control room was the former projection room," Palmer recalls. "Seeing the mics with 20-foot boom stands, and music stands left out from a session, somebody said, 'Wouldn't it be nice to have string parts?' And we got Del Newman in to do the strings, which was fantastic."

Bolero Babe gets its title from the rhythm.

"We wanted a little theme that goes on and on, as in Ravel's *Bolero*," says Palmer. "I played those shimmery synth things, and when the strings come in, it just fitted perfectly. Del read the song and the band really well."

Top Of The Hill is a gritty, intricate, rhythmically fluid song, with an inspired coda of strings and vibes. Family would often warm up with a studio improvisation before Chapman cued them in. But they liked the spontaneous prelude to the song so much that they kept for the album and it became part of the arrangement. Palmer had a Gibson Maestro sax and clarinet effects unit, which he also used for his vibes, and he fed Whitney's guitar through it for his solo on *Broken Nose*.

"That's actually a synth guitar solo, before anybody had invented a synth guitar," explains Palmer.

Idiosyncratic love song *Broken Nose* is driven by Wetton's bass, with Palmer playing a garish, flamboyant EML synth solo, and Linda Lewis on backing vocals. In the lyrics Chapman tells the tale of a man following his high-class object of desire.

"It was actually my skit on those kind of Leiber & Stoller songs, which I loved — The Coasters and all that," Chapman explains. But his imagination runs riot, culminating in, *'Oh, the day that I stopped loving you, was the day you broke my nose.'*

Swathed in Newman's strings and with a sweet guitar solo from Whitney, *Glove* is about a woman much less likely to have broken Chapman's nose.

"I imagined a sort of 19th-century genteel lady, maybe American, with a parasol, walking in a long dress," he says.

Chapman often used real-life observations as jumping-off points for his lyrics. The poignant *Coronation* focuses on a coronation mug and *'tattered empire souvenirs'* in what appears to be a lonely person's room.

"It's about me!" says Chapman. "The mug was actually on the dresser in my room."

He had recently moved into an apartment on Exhibition Road, London with Family manager Tony Gourvish and Jenny Fabian, author of the notorious autobiographical novel, *Groupie*. When Chapman sings, *'Doctor Sam going in next door'*, he's referring to Doctor Sam Hutt, aka country singer Hank Wangford.

"He moved in for a while. We let him use part of the lounge for his surgery," Chapman quips.

Ready To Go begins with a kind of R&B groove, before a shift up into the chorus melody, then has some unusual chord changes. Recently this writer spoke to a prominent prog guitarist who is fascinated by Whitney's chord

John Wetton sticks his necks out.

PRESS/FAMILY ARCHIVES/ESOTERIC

shapes. But although musically inviting, the lyrics deal with Chapman's annoyance at sniping reviews in the music press, with *'Your crass byline pulpit's beginning to smell.'*

Once *Bandstand* had been recorded, Wetton left to join King Crimson.

"John wanted something probably more adventurous," says Chapman. "And Crimson were a whole entity unto themselves, and still are to my mind, a fantastic band. I didn't blame him at all. I mean, if Crimson had asked me, I'd have probably joined them as well [laughs]."

One of Family's strongest albums, *Bandstand* reached No.15 in the UK and, like its predecessor, *Fearless*, sneaked into the US *Billboard* Top 200. With Jim Cregan now on bass, Family toured the US by invitation of Elton John. He was a fan of the group and had supported them when he was an up-and-coming singer-songwriter.

"In the big cities we went down well with Elton John's fans, but not everywhere," Chapman remembers. "You're in the middle of fucking nowhere, and you're still in a 15,000 [capacity] venue, and they wouldn't be so keen on us then. But it was a really great tour and didn't do the band any harm at all."

"In some places, it was like 'The Martians Have Landed'," says Palmer, "especially with Chappo going berserk [onstage], and they couldn't hack it. But mostly it was brilliant."

Charlie Whitney, Rob Townsend, Poli Palmer, John Wetton and Roger Chapman at the Bickershaw Festival in Greater Manchester, May 5, 1972.

In a field of their own: Family in 1971.

PRESS/FAMILY ARCHIVES/ESOTERIC

Despite Palmer having enjoyed recording *Bandstand*, he left before Family's next — and final — album, 1973's *It's Only A Movie*. There was no animosity behind the departure (he's currently writing new material with Chapman), he just needed a change.

"It was slowing up a little bit, and it's hard to maintain that mutual working off each other," he says. "You want every tune and every album to be really good, and when you don't think it's quite there it's better to just knock it on the head."

As well as their recorded legacy, Family were one of the most influential of the 70s progressive rock bands.

"I'll say this, and not because of my ego, but guys would come up and tell me how great they thought we were," says Chapman. "I'd say with Roxy Music, Genesis — Peter Gabriel particularly — we were definitely a small influence on their musical lives. And Queen, really. Even The Police. We were one of the founders and were just before them. They were picking up on us because we were doing something different from the general run of music. Like they have all these influencers now, we were a musical version of that."

The reissue of Bandstand is out now via Esoteric. See www.cherryred.co.uk for more.

ALL CHANGE

YET STILL THE SAME

Now a band in their own right, the Spock's Beard alumni are back with **Pattern-Seeking Animals** and their fourth album, *Spooky Action At A Distance*. This provides the perfect opportunity to catch up with multi-instrumentalist and founder John Boegehold, to discuss changing things up, bonus tracks, and what the future might hold for P-SA.

Words: Gary Mackenzie **Images:** Mark Berry

It's 11am in a very sunny Los Angeles when *Prog* catches up with Pattern-Seeking Animals keyboard player/multi-instrumentalist, main writer and producer John Boegehold, and he's already been up for more than five hours. It's an almost daily routine that allows time to boot up his studio to write and demo material before tackling his 'proper job' in property management, and he'll keep toying

with ideas throughout the day. This cycle of writing partly explains the vast pool of music (more than 200 songs, he estimates) Boegehold has amassed for a number of collaborations, film soundtrack work, contributions to Spock's Beard over the last 20 years and the already enviable back catalogue assembled by Pattern-Seeking Animals since 2018.

"When it gets to the point where I think, 'Oh, that would be a cool song' then I go full-speed ahead, I'll put all the tracks together and send them to the guys to do their parts, although with drums we always do everything live in the studio," he explains.

However, new P-SA album, *Spooky Action At A Distance*, has seen a shift from business as usual.

"The past three albums we've recorded with Rich Mouser at the Mouse House and it's been great — Rich is *so* good. You'll have heard his work a zillion times recording and mixing the 'who's who' of prog. Because our albums are so close together, the challenge with starting a new one right after the previous one is to make it sound different, not just a bunch of more tracks from the same sessions. But you're kind of trapped though, because Rich is so good you don't want to risk making any changes."

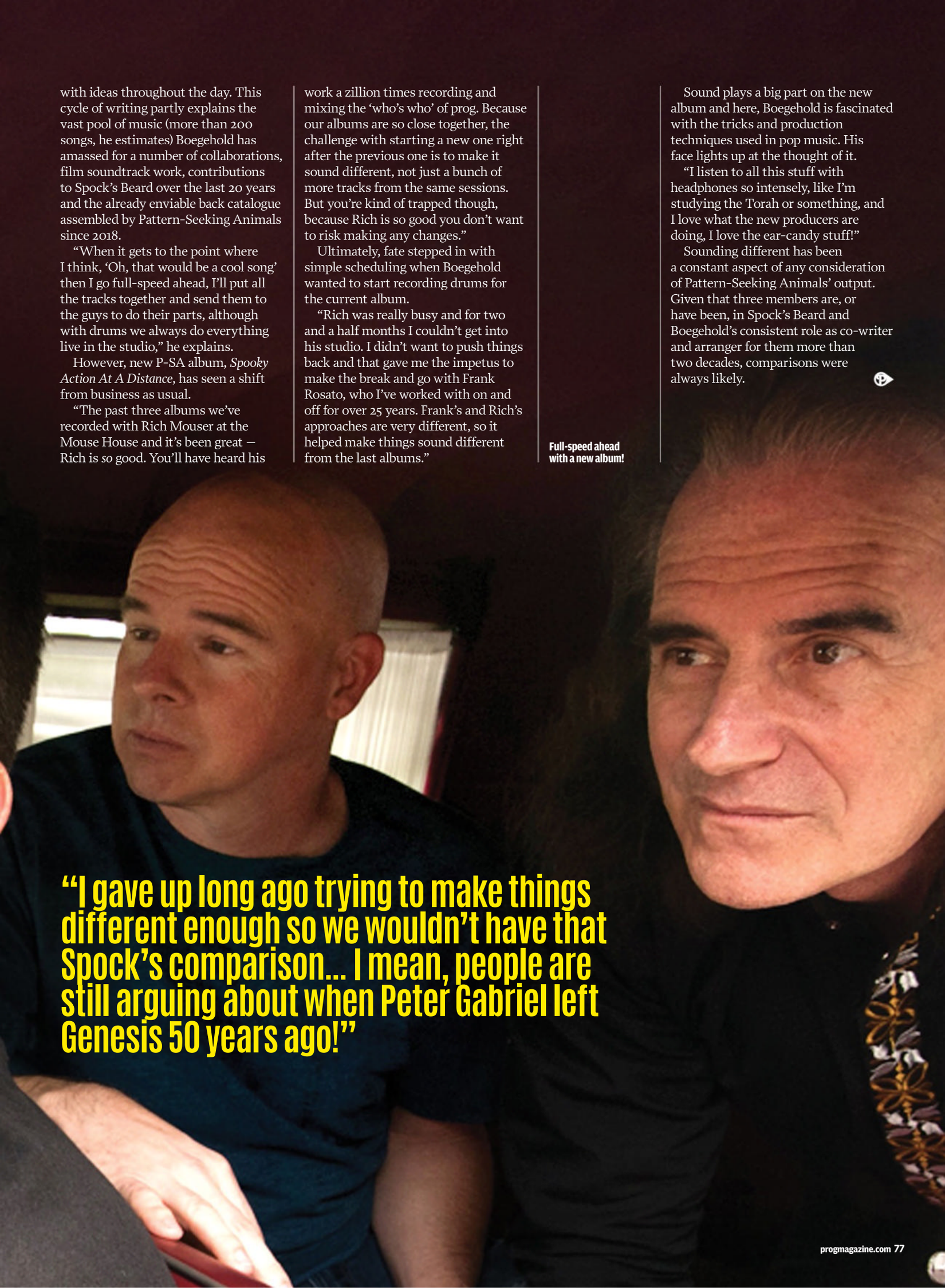
Ultimately, fate stepped in with simple scheduling when Boegehold wanted to start recording drums for the current album.

"Rich was really busy and for two and a half months I couldn't get into his studio. I didn't want to push things back and that gave me the impetus to make the break and go with Frank Rosato, who I've worked with on and off for over 25 years. Frank's and Rich's approaches are very different, so it helped make things sound different from the last albums."

Sound plays a big part on the new album and here, Boegehold is fascinated with the tricks and production techniques used in pop music. His face lights up at the thought of it.

"I listen to all this stuff with headphones so intensely, like I'm studying the Torah or something, and I love what the new producers are doing, I love the ear-candy stuff!"

Sounding different has been a constant aspect of any consideration of Pattern-Seeking Animals' output. Given that three members are, or have been, in Spock's Beard and Boegehold's consistent role as co-writer and arranger for them more than two decades, comparisons were always likely.



Full-speed ahead with a new album!

"I gave up long ago trying to make things different enough so we wouldn't have that Spock's comparison... I mean, people are still arguing about when Peter Gabriel left Genesis 50 years ago!"

P-SA L-R: Jimmy Keegan, Dave Meros, Ted Leonard, John Boegehold.

"I gave up long ago trying to make things different enough so we wouldn't have that Spock's comparison… I mean, people are still arguing about when Peter Gabriel left Genesis 50 years ago!" he says with a laugh. "But I don't try to make things different just to be different. I listen to so much new stuff constantly and by nature I tend to shake things up in my writing. I don't have any rules. I will jettison something if it sounds too similar to another song. I was writing for *Spooky Action…* and I came up with a really cool figure in the same time signature and the same vibe as *Time Has A Way* from [last album] *Only Passing Through*. I liked it but I trashed it because I didn't want people comparing."

But what about *Bulletproof*? The seventh track on *Spooky Action…* begs comparison since it had already featured on the bonus CD of Spock's Beard's 2018 *Noise Floor* and here it is again albeit in a completely re-recorded form.

"I really wasn't happy the way *Bulletproof* turned out on that album for various annoying reasons," he confides, not wanting to go into details.

"Of all the songs I've written, that's easily in my top five personal favourites. I hate bonus tracks and discs, both as a fan and an artist, as they can ruin the flow of an album, get tacked onto the end, or no one listens to them at all, and if that song had been on the main *Noise Floor* album I would never have re-recorded it. The fact that it was on the bonus disc meant that I felt OK to redo it and it started turning out really cool. I rewrote a lot of it — a different intro, the bridge is totally different, the ending is different, the choruses have been rewritten a bit, there's a female backing vocal alongside Jimmy [Keegan, drums] — I'm really happy with the way that one turned out."

There are some additional reworked older compositions on the album. *Under The Orphan Moon* was originally recorded with a project that Boegehold and bassist Dave Meros were involved with in the 90s called Orphan Moon. However, the subject matter — a young woman, who might be pregnant, fleeing a toxic domestic environment — seems slightly incongruous for a bunch of middle-aged men.

"We're all really happy with the way it turned out. It carries on with the band's sound and trajectory, but it's also different enough hopefully to keep your interest."

"I agree but, firstly, it was originally sung by [Orphan Moon vocalist] Diane Boothby and, secondly, I don't try to second-guess my audience or limit what I write about and I think that however old you are you can relate. This could be a daughter or granddaughter, we've all had situations in families where there's the black sheep or a bad relationship, but also it comes back to how the vocalist expresses it."

Boegehold throws references to many pop, rock and prog artists into the conversation, but he chooses one in particular to illustrate his point.

"Take Olivia Rodrigo: she's like 19/20 years old, huge pop star, super-talented and a gifted writer. She did a song on her last album about her getting her driver's licence [*Drivers License, Sour*], it's all, 'I'm 15 and I broke up with this guy.' I can't identify with that at my age, but the way she sang it and the way it was written, it just hit me emotionally because her delivery was so good," he enthuses.

Spooky Action At A Distance explores a number of themes and takes inspiration from a variety of sources. Opener *The Man Made Of Stone* was prompted by Netflix series *The Last Kingdom* about the coming of the Vikings to ninth-century Anglo-Saxon England.

"Big Big Train's Greg Spawton recommended it on Facebook, and after I watched the first season I got in touch to thank him. I wrote about nothing specific but it's about a Norse king who's dying, wondering if all the fighting, killing and plundering was really worth it."

War from a different angle serves as the backdrop to the album's mini-epic, *He Once Was*.

"I was reading a book by Dr Lindsey Fitzharris called *The Facemaker*, and it was about Harold Gillies, who made amazing advances in plastic surgery during World War I. I thought it might be cool to do something based on meeting a guy who was badly injured physically and mentally during the war. I really like the imagery of it."

The track also features British saxophonist Alex Bone delivering a terrific solo, although not everyone was enthusiastic about it.

"Ted and Jimmy hated the idea!" reveals Boegehold. "I mean they like it now. Dave loved it and I loved it, but it's a divisive instrument. I think it's really cool."

Summoned From Afar was prompted by Boegehold's interest in Japanese anime and a particular character who looked like a heavily armed teenage girl with angel wings, around which he imagined a back story about a reluctant warrior being pulled back into the fray.

"Obviously, if I understood Japanese I'd probably know for sure!" he quips.

With Boegehold even suggesting that recording on a new album could be starting very soon and the possibility of live shows, (which he won't be performing because "I'm not a good enough player. I play enough to be able to write, but I can barely play with two hands at the same time!"), the future for Pattern-Seeking Animals looks bright.

Boegehold has the final word for P-SA fans: "We're all really happy with the way it turned out. It carries on with the band's sound and trajectory, but it's also different enough hopefully to keep your interest."

***Spooky Action At A Distance* is out now.**

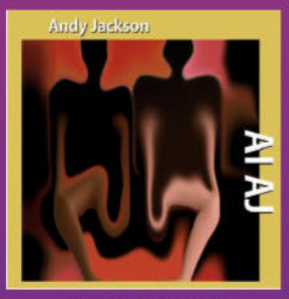
Spooky Action At A Distance is out now via InsideOutMusic. See psanimals1.com for more information.

NEW RELEASES

JANE GETTER PREMONITION
'DIVISION WORLD'
(CD)

- The new studio album from the award-winning guitarist, vocalist and composer Jane Getter and her band.
- Featuring Adam Holzman (Steven Wilson Band, Miles Davis), featuring Alex Skolnick (Testament), Paul Frazier and Gene Lake.
- Release Date 23rd February 2024

EANTCD1103



ANDY JACKSON
'AI AJA'
(CD & BLU-RAY EDITION)

- AI AJ' is an album which was inspired by the ongoing debate about the impact of artificial intelligence technology on our lives.
- As one has come to expect of Andy Jackson, this new album is once again an impressive and thoughtful musical work of sonic excellence. The release also features a Blu Ray disc featuring a stunning 96 kHz / 24-bit 5.1 Surround Sound mix. 'AI AJ' is destined to become one of the most original, impressive and talked about progressive albums of the year.
- Release Date 23rd February 2024

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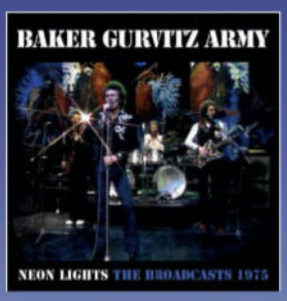


BAKER GURVITZ ARMY
'NEON LIGHTS - THE BORADCASTS 1975'
(3CD/2DVD BOXSET)

- New remastered 3CD & 2 DVD clamshell boxed set of archive live recordings by Baker Gurvitz Army made for BBC radio & TV, independent radio & Radio Bremen in 1975. With fully restored artwork & new essay.
- Release Date 26th January 2024

ECLEC52854

HIGH TIDE
'SEA SHANTIES'
(REMASTERED GATEFOLD VINYL EDITION)

- This official gatefold LP vinyl edition fully restores the original LP artwork, has been remastered from the original Liberty master tapes and has been cut at Abbey Road studios.
- Release Date 23rd February 2024

QECLECLP2857

KEVIN AYERS
'JOY OF A TOY'
(REMASTERED GATEFOLD VINYL EDITION)

- This official gatefold LP vinyl edition fully restores the original LP artwork, has been remastered from the original Harvest master tapes and has been cut at Abbey Road studios.
- Release Date 26th January 2024

QECLECLP2858

VINYL

PROCUL HARUM
'SHINE ON BRIGHTLY'
(REMASTERED VINYL EDITION)

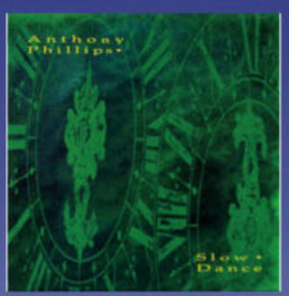
- This new vinyl edition of this classic album has been cut at Abbey Road Studios and utilises the gatefold sleeve design of the September 1968 US release.
- Release Date 23rd February 2024

ECLECLP2501

ANTHONY PHILLIPS & HARRY WILLIAMSON
'GYPSY SUITE'
(REMASTERED & EXPANDED EDITION)

- New remastered and expanded release of the evocative recordings by Genesis founder member Anthony Phillips and Harry Williamson.
- Remastered from the original master tapes. With five bonus tracks. Fully restored artwork and new essay.
- Release Date 23rd February 2024

ECLEC2860

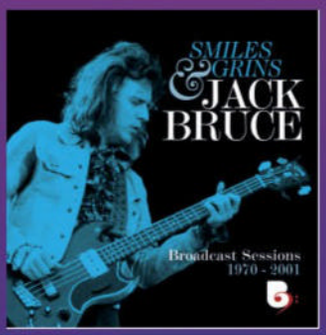


ANTHONY PHILLIPS
'SLOW DANCE'
(2 CD JEWEL CASE EDITION)

- 2CD edition of the classic instrumental album by Genesis founder member Anthony Phillips, 'Slow Dance'.
- This 2CD jewel case edition of the album features the remastered original stereo mix, along with a CD of previously unreleased 'Slow Dance' vignettes. It includes a lavishly illustrated booklet that fully restores the original album artwork and features a new essay by Jon Dann in the booklet.
- Release Date 26th January 20 24

ECLEC22590

JACK BRUCE
'SMILES AND GRINS BROADCAST SESSIONS 1970 - 2001'
(4CD/2BLU-RAY VIDEO REMASTERED BOX SET)



- A new official 4CD & 2 multi-region Blu Ray video boxed set anthology featuring the surviving radio & television broadcast sessions by the legendary Jack Bruce recorded between 1970 & 2001. Featuring an un-broadcast TV session of lifetime for Beat Club in 1970 & all the surviving BBC Radio & TV session recordings & appearances, including two concerts screened by the Old Grey Whistle test in 1975 & 1981.
- All newly remastered & restored from the original master tapes. Includes an illustrated book with essay.
- Release Date 26th January 2024

ECLEC62852

COLOSSEUM
'ELEGY-THE RECORDINGS 1968-1971'
(6CD BOXSET)

- 6CD boxed set celebrating the work of Colosseum recorded between 1968 and 1971. A remastered set including the albums 'Those About To Die Salute You', 'Valentyne Suite', 'The Grass Is Greener', 'Daughter Of Time' and 'Colosseum Live' plus an additional 12 bonus tracks drawn from studio sessions and live recordings. Includes an illustrated book with essay.
- Release Date 23rd February 2024

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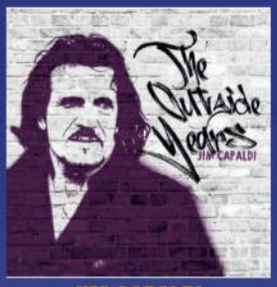
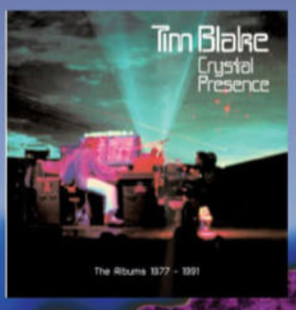


JIM CAPALDI
'THE OUTSIDE YEARS'
(4CD REMASTERED EDITION CLAMSHELL BOX SET)

- Spanning the years 1993 – 2004 this collection features remastered versions of the albums 'Living On the Outside' and 'Poor Boy Blue', and also includes a further 35 additional tracks drawn from demos, studio out-takes and previously unreleased live recordings from Jim's personal archive. Featured in this new boxed set are highlights of a solo acoustic performance in Philadelphia USA in June 1999, a wonderful concert recorded at the Music Hall, Cologne, Germany in 2002 and a selection of other live recordings.
- Among the demos is a recording of 'Love's Got a Hold On Me' featuring George Harrison.
- Release Date 26th January 2024

ECLEC42853



TIM BLAKE
'CRYSTAL PRESENCE'
(3CD BOXSET)

- New remastered 3CD clamshell box anthology featuring the first three albums by legendary synthesiser pioneer Tim Blake. Includes the albums 'Crystal Machine', 'Blake's New Jerusalem' and 'Magick', plus an illustrated booklet.
- Release Date 23rd February 2024

ECLEC32862

Set The Controls...

Producer Youth talks to *Prog* about his new reboot of **The Orb** & **David Gilmour**'s 2010 collaboration album *Metallic Spheres* into *Metallic Spheres In Colour* – and the mouthwatering prospect of the project being performed live, super-hi-tech, which would be "the most amazing gig I could ever witness".

Words: Julian Marszalek **Images:** Press/Youth Archives

There's an undeniable synchronicity at play knowing that The Orb and David Gilmour's *Metallic Spheres In Colour*, the remix of their 2010 album *Metallic Spheres*, can be traced back to the activities of Scottish systems administrator Gary McKinnon, who in 2002 was accused by the US government of "committing the biggest military hack of all time". In his defence, McKinnon pleaded harmless motives by claiming he was looking for information on UFOs. With McKinnon facing extradition, decades in jail and a potential $2m fine, Pink Floyd guitarist David Gilmour stepped up to the fundraising plate with the release of *Chicago – Change The World*, a cover of Graham Nash's 1971 single *Chicago*, which in turn was later remixed by The Orb and producer Martin 'Youth' Glover with the full participation of David Gilmour, to become *Metallic Spheres*. Now it's been given a whole new lease of life.

"It's a remix of a remix of a cover!" Youth says with a laugh, as he ponders the long road from the Nash cover to *Metallic Spheres In Colour*.

David Gilmour instigated the original 2010 album after he and Youth – best-known as the bassist with pioneering post-punk band Killing Joke – had been working on another project.

"David suggested this Gary McKinnon remix," Youth recalls, "and I just developed that into, 'Well, let's do some extra guitars,' and then you're in the same room working together. You take it from there, really. I thought that was more interesting than just doing a straightforward remix."

This wasn't the first time Youth had worked on such a project with an artist of such a huge global stature. "The Fireman project with Paul

"McCartney and Gilmour are artists, and they want to do things that are creative and edgy as well as appealing to their own sensibilities. Part of my job as a producer is to encourage the artist to do that."

Youth, bringing new life to classic sounds.

McCartney started when he asked me to do a remix," says Youth. "I said, 'Well, rather than do a remix, let me just sample sounds off your album, construct a new track, and maybe you do a couple of overdubs.' And he was like, 'Oh, has anyone done that before?' I said, 'No.' He said, 'Oh, that's good! Let's do that, then.' McCartney and Gilmour are artists, and they want to do things that are creative and edgy as well as appealing to their own sensibilities. Part of my job as a producer is to encourage the artist to do that."

Given the cosmic nature of both The Orb's succession of albums and Pink Floyd's back catalogue, the biggest surprise with *Metallic Spheres* isn't that the collaboration took place at all, but that it took so long to come to fruition — especially as The Orb's Alex Paterson and Youth had been huge Pink Floyd fans since their schooldays together in the 70s ("We've wanted to work with David Gilmour since the beginning," Youth says with a grin). Consequently, Floyd's influence had left an indelible mark on The Orb's expansive music, while the sleeve of their *Live 93* album gives a sly wink to the iconic artwork of Floyd's *Animals*. But why has *Metallic Spheres* been given an overhaul now?

"The original was much leaner and cleaner," explains Youth, "but it was a bit Marmite for a lot of The Orb's fans — some really loved it and some thought it was wasn't really The Orb. It wasn't exceptionally The Orb and it wasn't exceptionally David Gilmour. It was more between the two. There was talk of remastering it. I said, 'Why don't we just remix it?' I could get Alex Paterson and his bandmate Michael Rendall to apply their genius into re-envisioning it with a more classic Orb aesthetic. I think it's benefited from becoming more of a definitive Orb record."

The resulting album, *Metallic Spheres In Colour,* gains from a greater warmth and depth in sound that was absent from the gloss of its predecessor. Here, The Orb's characteristic deep throbs, pulses and ambient washes coalesce more strongly with Gilmour's beautifully cosmic guitar playing. Over the album's two extended tracks — *Seamless Solar Spheres Of Affection Mix* and *Seamlessly Martian Spheres Of Reflection Mix* — the parameters of space rock, prog, dub, psychedelia, ambient and electronic music aren't just pushed further into the outer reaches, they're actually woven to create a whole new entity. But what is it that binds these threads together?

"That's an interesting question," ponders Youth. "It's an attitude, I think, and a philosophy. I've done my own deductions of what that is. It's the legacy and lineage of all of what I do and everything I'm involved with, whether it's [sound system] Spiral Tribe, The Orb, David Gilmour and so on. It all goes back to this Dionysian, bohemian underground current that has always been there going back to the earliest shamanic rituals in caves.

The original Orb and David Gilmour sessions took place in Youth's studio (The Dreaming Cave) in June 2009.

"David does want to do this live. He's keen and I wouldn't rule it out."

"All the way through history there has been this Dionysian element, and that's what I'm attracted to. It's Triple Goddess-orientated. It's timeless, it's transgressive and it's shamanic in its essence. Its role is to rebalance and counterpoint the more established elements of society, and it facilitates a kind of primal energy we all have of emotional expression and celebration, and, to a greater or lesser degree, liberation and a certain amount of ecstatic losing yourself. It's a rave aesthetic and sensibility without the 160 bpm kick drum. All of these scenes have a psychedelic element, which is the soul of shamanic trance states, and the intention is to gain transcendence."

But surely the greatest way to gain transcendence would be to put all of this into a live setting? The prospect of seeing The Orb and David Gilmour bring their collaboration to the stage in tandem with the increase in audio-visual technology is a tantalising one, but is there any realistic possibility of such an event happening?

"I want to believe there is," says Youth, "and I hang on to the rainbow of that because I can just imagine it would be the most mind-blowing event."

According to Youth, a number of possibilities concerning live performances have been mooted. One idea certainly runs close to the original cause of Gary McKinnon's plight — staging an outdoor event close to Area 51 in the Nevada desert. Popular among UFOlogists and conspiracy theorists the world over, this is where — according to them — the United States Air Force holds evidence of extra-terrestrial life and interplanetary travel.

"I had this idea of building special quadrophonic sound system stacks and burying all the sub-bass into the sand, so that whole desert sand would be like a boom box," says Youth. "Basically, they had four quad stacks, and then you'd have to go full Atmos and have 36 speakers and have things flying around, and you'd do it outside in the desert and you have, like, my most amazing visuals. That could still be the most amazing gig I could ever witness. I think that would be even more amazing than U2's recent triumph in Las Vegas [their opening show at The Sphere], which was pretty mind-blowing. I think you could even blow that out the water by doing that."

Youth's imagination isn't limited to just that concept. "The other idea is to do a show outside the pyramids in Giza, which is a possibility as well," he offers.

The prospect of these locations — as well as a mooted show at the Sierra Navada Observatory, close to Youth's studio in Spain — are indeed tantalising. Each location would bring a unique visual characteristic of their own. But just how close are they to actually coming to fruition?

"Well, you've got to be realistic," Youth sighs. "David Gilmour is going to be 80 in a couple of years' time. And he's reached a degree of success where he really doesn't have to do anything. But David does want to do this live. He's keen and I wouldn't rule it out."

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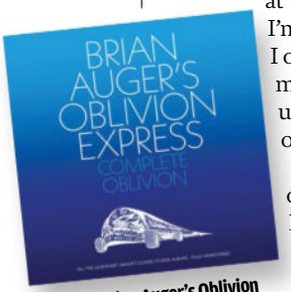
THE PROG INTERVIEW

BRIAN AUGER

Every month we get inside the mind of one of the biggest names in music. This issue it's pianist and master of the Hammond organ **Brian Auger**. Although probably best known for Julie Driscoll, Brian Auger And The Trinity's 1968 hit *This Wheel's On Fire*, away from the pop world he's highly regarded as a pioneer jazzer who sought to "develop this idea of a bridge between jazz and different musical worlds". Before that one-off hit, he had the band The Steampacket with vocalists Driscoll, Rod Stewart and Long John Baldry, and after The Trinity formed Brian Auger's Oblivion Express. In his long and storied musical journey, Auger has also worked with Jimi Hendrix, John McLaughlin, Tony Williams, Sonny Boy Williamson and Eric Burdon, among many other big names from across the musical spectrum. Brian Auger's Oblivion Express's *Complete Oblivion* box set was released in 2023.



Out now: Brian Auger's Oblivion Express Complete Oblivion box set.

Words: Rob Hughes

It's the day before Brian Auger's 84th birthday, and the legendary Hammond maestro is in fine spirits. Seated in his practice space at home in Los Angeles, he explains that he's getting together with his family to toast the occasion. That means a visit from his grandkids and children, three of whom – son Karma and daughters Ali and Savannah – have at one time or another played in Auger's ground-breaking jazz-fusion ensemble Oblivion Express.

There's also cause for a celebration of the musical kind: the recent release of *Complete Oblivion*, a lavish box set of the band's essential run of studio albums from 1970-75, a period that saw Auger move from progressive jazz rock to deep jazz funk and beyond, driven by his love of experimentation and dynamic rhythms. It's the latest and most lustrous in a spate of recent remasters that have sought to place Auger's formidable output in some kind of context, from his early days in British R&B band The Steampacket, which also featured vocalists Rod Stewart, Long John Baldry and Julie Driscoll, to solo works and late-60s combo The Trinity.

"Revisiting this stuff has been quite a revelation to me," he marvels, "because there's been a lot of music that I'd not listened to for a while. But those old records are coming at me and I'm going, 'Wow! Did I really do that?' I think it's just the fact that I was so fired up. I became a professional musician in 1963, and now I'm at that point where I'm looking back. I often think to myself that the universe has smiled on me many times."

Auger started out as a pianist in London's vibrant jazz scene of the early 60s. Galvanised by Jimmy Smith's funky organ sound, he'd switched to Hammond B3 by 1965, by which time he'd co-founded The Steampacket with singer Long John Baldry, alongside a young Rod Stewart and 18-year-old newcomer Julie Driscoll. The band weren't built to last, but he wasted little time in forming Brian Auger And The Trinity, taking the redoubtable Driscoll with him as lead singer.

Heading up The Trinity allowed Auger to explore the porous possibilities of jazz, blues, R&B and the emergent psychedelia, releasing a succession of late-60s albums and scoring a UK No.5 hit with a luminous cover of Bob Dylan's *This Wheel's On Fire*.

> "Keith Emerson was a great friend of mine, a really wonderful guy. He'd tell me about playing the organ upside down on stage and stuff. I couldn't believe it."

Having rubbed shoulders with the likes of John McLaughlin, Jimi Hendrix and Keith Emerson along the way, Auger threw himself into the 70s with his Oblivion Express. The fluid set-up hit early peaks with 1972's *Second Wind* and follow-up *Closer To It!*, augmenting daring new material with radical reinterpretations of music by Eddie Harris, Marvin Gaye and Gene McDaniels.

Auger drew breath for a while in the late 80s, joining Eric Burdon's touring band, before founding a new Oblivion Express in the mid-90s. By then, Auger was being lauded by a new generation of admirers as the Godfather Of Acid Jazz. Not for nothing did the great keyboard player Herbie

GILLES PETARD/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES
Brian Auger's Oblivion Express in 1972.

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

Shady character? Brian Auger on April 14, 1975.

Hancock hail him as "one of the best [Hammond] B3 artists I've ever heard in my life. His technique is awesome and the amount of energy he generates is unparalleled and relentless."

So, how did it all begin for you?
By the time I was three we had a pianola in the house. It belonged to my dad. We had all the operas in piano form, all sorts of different little concertos and some ragtime, which I loved. I used to drive it by pedalling away. It's driven by air, and the sheet of music would come down around the bobbin and make all the notes play. I was fascinated. It was hours and hours of what I wanted to do. My favourite was the *William Tell Overture*. My older brother had a collection of American jazz – Satchmo, Duke Ellington, Count Basie. I loved the swing. My sisters loved Nat Cole, and my mum and dad used to like songs from musicals. So I was surrounded by this whole musical thing. Then I heard [boogie-woogie/ragtime pianist] Winifred Atwell. I thought, "My God, I've got to find out if I can play like that. It's gonna take me a long time." Eventually I got the *Cross Hands Boogie* down.

So, was it always going to be a musical life?
Not really. For some reason, my parents had got hold of this idea of me being a chartered accountant. But what happened was my dad passed away and I really was the next in line in the family. There were six of us. Three had gotten married already, then there was me. I was at home and somebody had to look after paying the rent. I was a semi-pro at that time, doing quite a lot of playing, and that helped to keep it all together. And then along the way I got pushed towards becoming a professional musician. When I look back, I think the universe has kind of put me here for music.

You mentioned swing. I believe you took a lot of inspiration from jazz sax players rather than from pianists?
Yes. When I was improvising on organ, people thought I'd been listening to Jimmy Smith and people like that. But I'd been listening to so many Black saxophone players. Those were the guys that kind of guided me and made me realise what you could do over chords. I'd play at [London jazz club] Ronnie Scott's – I'd got to the point where I had my own trio there, opening for the Americans – then I'd walk two minutes down the road and play at the Flamingo. And the audience was totally different. In Ronnie's you'd say, "Hey, how are ya?" and they'd go, "Shhh! Quiet now." So we began to call it the Temple Of Doom! But then on Saturday nights at the Flamingo it was a mix of American Army people from the bases, people from the islands and white kids, all loving this music. They'd dance all night and it was just an amazing atmosphere. So they were two very different places and I had a foot in each.

Did you get any flak from the jazz purists?
Oh yeah. Certain people I knew from the scene wouldn't speak to me any more when I got a hit with Julie Driscoll. They'd cut me dead in the street. But it's all music, y'know. I just had a great time. Everybody wanted to come to London in the 60s. It was absolutely full of amazing music and bands. And the British Invasion just kind of swept around the world. It was like a movement. We all belonged to one another, it didn't matter whether we could speak the language or not.

Did it feel like a cultural shift was happening?
In some ways, but we were just enjoying ourselves. It wasn't until later on that I started thinking about that. Keith Emerson was a great friend of mine, a really wonderful guy. He'd tell me about playing the organ upside down on stage and stuff. I couldn't believe it. I remember we got talking about influences. I said to him, "Where did it all start for you?" And whose name came up? Winifred Atwell! We found out that we were influenced by the same people, except I was on the jazz track and he was on the prog side.

Did you feel an affinity with prog back then?
Because Keith Emerson was my best buddy, I had a listen to what he did. I hadn't heard of prog at that time, but I went to see him play in Croydon or somewhere like that. He did *America*, and I thought he was just incredible. I never really understood what 'prog' meant, because to me it's just music. All this stuff – jazz, R&B, prog, whatever – has grown from some kind of root.

I believe he did credit you as a major influence on his playing in The Nice?
Well, he once told me, "What you don't know, Bri, is I went to the Marquee one night and you were playing this thing called *Rock Candy*, by 'Brother' Jack McDuff. And I was mesmerised. I thought, 'I want to play like that!'"

Brian Auger with the wonderful Julie Driscoll.

JEREMY FLETCHER/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

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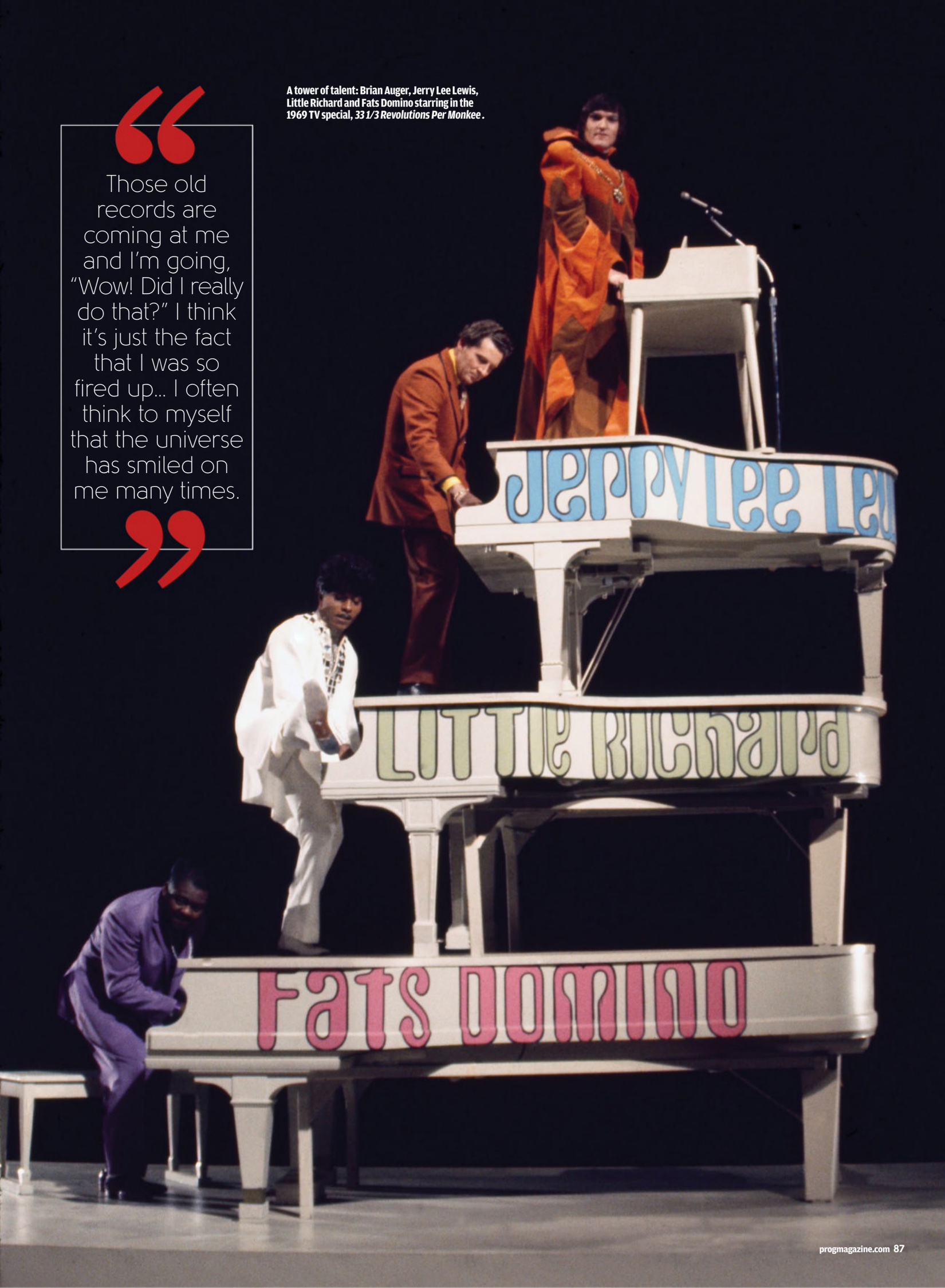
> Those old records are coming at me and I'm going, "Wow! Did I really do that?" I think it's just the fact that I was so fired up... I often think to myself that the universe has smiled on me many times.



A tower of talent: Brian Auger, Jerry Lee Lewis, Little Richard and Fats Domino starring in the 1969 TV special, *33 1/3 Revolutions Per Monkee*.

How did The Steampacket come about?

I was playing at the Twisted Wheel one Saturday night in Manchester, and Long John Baldry grabbed me: "I need to talk to you, Brian. Would you like to come up and meet my management people?" They told me that John was giving up his band, The Hoochie Coochie Men, and asked if I'd be interested in running his new one. I told them I'd have to pick the personnel and use my own rhythm section. They said, "John insists that he has this guy called Rod Stewart", who at that time was kind of wandering around the scene, sitting in with different bands. I thought, "Well, why not?" Then I mentioned adding Julie Driscoll.

What was it about Julie that made her such a sympathetic collaborator?

She could more or less sing anything. My manager had asked me to play on this record he was doing, and it turned out to be Julie on vocals. I'd never seen her before. I thought, "Wow, she can sing!" And then I find out she's working in the office, answering Yardbirds fan mail, waiting to get out on the road with a band. There was the universe putting it all together for us again. And that was it. Rod was a strange guy, though. At one point we left for an English tour, and he would immediately go to the bar. He'd say, "Buy us a drink, guv." When I'd ask where his money was, he'd go, "Oh, my mum makes me put it in my Post Office account." I was supposed to be running the whole thing, trying to keep it in order, and people were wanting me to sub them their money. I didn't like that. Rod was somebody who felt that he was above the rest, I think. But he was a friend of Long John Baldry's, so I let it go. I remember playing at Klooks Kleek in West Hampstead and an argument developed, because he'd said something to Julie that she didn't like — he called her "fat legs". There were a lot of people in the room, and Julie picked up this pint of beer and threw it at his feet and it smashed. He was really upset about his shoes: "What are you doing? My shoes!" Then it just got out of hand. The Steampacket was kind of ridiculous.

Julie Driscoll, Brian Auger And The Trinity's *This Wheel's On Fire*.

Guitarist John McLaughlin was in your quintet in the early days.

The opening track on the first Oblivion Express album is your version of his *Dragon Song*, so there seems to be a very strong kinship there.

Oh yeah, we were great friends. He was playing like Wes Montgomery when I first met him, but he liked an American guy called Tal Farlow, a wonderful player. We didn't really have a band, but we would go out on the weekend and do a lot of work for the Americans, either the Air Force or the Army. They always had a club. I thought John was the best guitar player that I knew on the scene. Later on, when I was in New York, he was recording the *Devotion* album [February 1970]. He called me and asked if I wanted to come over and listen to the mixes. So I went over there, heard *Dragon Song* and thought, "I must record that myself." Not long after that, the door opens and Jimi Hendrix comes in. Jimi was an old friend of mine, because he played with my band at the Cromwellian the first time he arrived in London. We went outside and he looked terribly ill to me. His skin was kind of grey. He said, "Can you stay and make an album with me?" I asked how long it would take, and he said about three months. I was more used to making an album in three days. So I said, "Well, I've got all this work, man." I couldn't drop everything, because they'd probably sue me. "But I'd love to do something. I hear you've got this studio." He said, "Yeah, come down tomorrow and you can listen to some of the jams we've been doing." And then he pulls out some silver paper and unwraps it. It's brown heroin and he's about to sniff this stuff. I didn't want to deal with any of that shit. I said to him, "Jimi, you've got to stop doing this, man. This stuff will kill you." And he said — and I'll never forget this — "Y'know what, Bri? I need a lot more people around me like you." I went over the next day, saw the studio and listened to the jams. They were amazing. Then six months later he was gone.

Am I right in thinking Hendrix's management team wanted him to front your band at one point?

Yes. Before this happened, I got a call from Chas Chandler, who had an office in town with a guy

The Steampacket: Rod Stewart and Long John Baldry with Julie Driscoll and Brian Auger, circa 1965.

DEZO HOFFMAN/SHUTTERSTOCK

Brian Auger has the keys to the kingdom.

PRESS/ELDE STEWART

called Mike Jeffery, who I thought was probably the biggest crook I'd ever seen. To be fair to Chas, I said that I'd go and see what they wanted from me. Mike Jeffery said, "Bri, we've brought this amazing guitar player over from New York. We want him to front your band." About two months before that I'd started The Trinity with Julie Driscoll. So I told them I'd like to help, but I already had a band and that Julie fronted it. "I also have a guitar player, so what do you expect me to do? Just dump them on the pavement?" And Mike Jeffery said, "That's your problem." I remember thinking, "No wonder I don't want anything to do with you."

What was the vision for The Trinity?

We were trying to build a bridge between the jazz scene and rock and blues, everything that was going on at the time. I felt there were certain things that I could play that would make some of the guys from the rock side listen to what was going on in the jazz world, and vice versa. And it kind of worked out. Not in a big way, but it did work out. I remember walking in central London, and who should I meet but Keith Moon. He had a Sonny Rollins album under his arm. "Moonie! I can't believe it. You listen to that stuff?" He says, "Yeah, I like some of it, but a lot of it I don't understand!" But there you go. That was The Trinity.

> "Rod [Stewart] was a strange guy though... He'd say, "Buy us a drink, guv." When I'd ask where his money was, he'd go, "Oh, my mum makes me put it in my Post Office account."

How did you approach recording your cover of *This Wheel's On Fire*?

The Dylan tapes had been going around. Manfred Mann did *Mighty Quinn*, so by the time it got to us there were only two tracks left. One was *This Wheel's On Fire*. It was a strange kind of thing, but Julie liked it immediately. I wasn't so sure. I said, "Look, I'm going to take this home and see whether I can come up with some idea of how to do it." I tried a few rock rhythms and different things, but none of that worked. And I suddenly realised, "Wait a minute, this guy's playing a walking bass here. Let's just keep that and do this like a march." So I put a piano track down, then an organ track, and Julie came in and sang this amazing vocal over it. There was a lot of weird psychedelic stuff happening at the time. And when we slowed it down it had that kind of strange feel about it. I was amazed that it took off.

When you dissolved The Trinity to form Oblivion Express, was there any push-back from the record company?

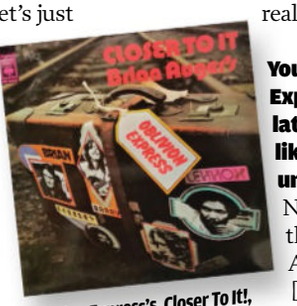
Oh yeah. They wanted me to continue with the sort of things we'd done with The Trinity. There's two types of people in the music business: the musicians, and the accountants. And they want to keep you in the same slot if you've got something going. But I wasn't having that. I was further along in thinking that I'd like to develop this idea of a bridge between jazz and different musical worlds. So I went ahead. With Oblivion Express I was taking a risk going forward. I thought, "I'm definitely wading against the commercial tide, but I could fall on my face here." That's why I called it the Oblivion Express.

You seemed to have more freedom with Oblivion Express.

Absolutely. I was able to just do what the hell I liked. Which is OK as long as it works. Fortunately, people liked what I was doing. I found tunes and rearranged them to fit this idea of trying to drag one side over into the other.

In the late 80s you became known as the Godfather Of Acid Jazz to a new generation of DJs and tastemakers. What brought that on?

Eddie Piller [DJ and founder of the Acid Jazz label] told me it was all based on the Oblivion Express *Closer To It!* album [1973]. That album we made in two afternoons, live in the studio. I just thought, "That's more what I want, it's more rhythmic. We'll see whether anybody likes it." And in America they did, particularly the Black community. That was wonderful, because it felt like that was the start of everything really getting going.



Oblivion Express's *Closer To It!*, made in just two afternoons!

You revived Oblivion Express decades later. Did it feel like you had some unfinished business?

Not really. It's just that I love to play. At that time, Karma [Brian's son, drums] was playing fantastic, and my daughter, Ali [lead vocalist], was also in the band. But she couldn't take the road, it was too much for her. Then [daughter] Savannah came in and was like a great breath of sunshine. So I started to forge ahead, and let them choose some of the things to re-record. And I just had a ball.

Do you ever think about your legacy?

Not really. I think that's for other people to decide. All I'm doing is making music, man. I speak Italian, French and German, but the loudest I speak is the language of music. It cuts through all the boundaries.

Brian Auger's Oblivion Express's Complete Oblivion box set is out now via Soul Bank Music.

STEVE HACKETT

The ex-Genesis guitarist's first fully-fledged concept album in decades is a dizzying, delirious box of delights.

Words: Mike Barnes **Illustration:** Pete Fowler

"Are you sitting comfortably?" asks the voice from the BBC Radio programme *Listen With Mother* from within a sound collage at the beginning of *People From The Smoke*, the track that opens *The Circus And The Nightwhale*. It's more than coincidence that this famous phrase was first uttered in 1950, the year of Steve Hackett's birth, as the story begins in traumatised post-war London when the national broadcaster was a reassuring presence, and follows the rites of passage of the principal character, Travla – who despite his name, is based on the guitarist.

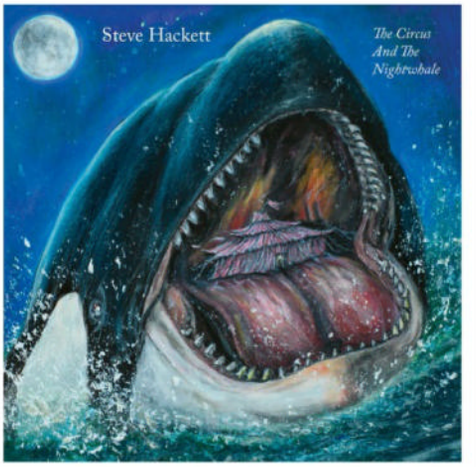
Hackett's solo debut, 1975's *The Voyage Of The Acolyte*, was a concept album, taking its inspiration from the tarot, but apart from toying with some themes on 1980's *Defector*, which he states is not a complete concept album, he hasn't revisited that format until *The Circus And The Nightwhale* – a wise move that's resulted in one of his very best releases.

When in Genesis, Hackett contributed to one of progressive rock's most famous concept albums, *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway*. Its protagonist, Rael, was the hapless victim of unfathomable outside forces. But although *The Lamb...* follows its own strange logic, we always know where Rael is within the narrative. *The Circus And The Nightwhale* is different in that while it's inspired by Hackett's memories, it's a kaleidoscope of real and imagined elements rather than a linear story. He also wanted to have different musical eras co-existing within the same song, and here Hackett has constructed a world and invites the listener in.

On *People Of The Smoke*, Hackett and his co-lyricist and wife, Jo, describe the gritty reality of London and how it was culturally transformed by the energy of 60s youth culture and rock'n'roll. This feeling of emancipation, of not having to bow *'to your betters'* is reflected in a passage of formal string figures, before Hackett's lead guitar bursts in at thrilling speed. He wanted

The Circus And The Nightwhale

INSIDEOUTMUSIC



> **The most dazzling guitar-playing of his career.**

The Circus And The Nightwhale to be musically and emotionally overwhelming and he gives us some of the most flamboyant and dazzling guitar-playing of his career. As a youth, Hackett lived opposite Battersea Power Station, and worked at London's only permanent funfair, which was situated next to it. This idea of the *'Fairground dreamland'* leads us into the album's fast-moving, cinematic moods.

The core musicians are from Hackett's live band: Craig Blundell on drums, bassist Jonas Reingold, Roger King on keyboards and orchestral arrangements, and Rob Townsend on saxophone. Vocalist Nad Sylvan makes a guest appearance on the ominous, loping *Taking You Down*, about a child card sharp who Hackett actually knew, but they're recast here as a demonic character. Townsend unleashes a torrential sax solo, which urges Hackett onto ever more expansive playing.

Harp-like 12-string guitar and synth bass notes, reminiscent of the Genesis song *Entangled* from *A Trick Of The Tail*, feature on *Enter The Ring*. Hackett sings harmonies with Amanda Lehman, then his brother John leads a jig-like section on flute and the song moves into an orchestral section with echoes of the giddy fairground swirl of The Beatles' *Being For The Benefit Of Mister Kite*.

A feeling of panic and being trapped pervades *Get Me Out* with Travla *'Stuck to the wall on a spinning wheel'*, and Hackett's guitar is harsh and aggressive. *Ghost Moon And Living Love* is more lyrical, a rumination on the thrill of new love and its redemptive power, but all is under threat once more on *Circo Inferno*. Malik Mansurov's tar introduces the dance, with sax and guitar outbursts, and the band locking into some fast, agitated unison sections.

A number of short instrumentals link the songs and *All At Sea* is another sound collage with Hackett's quicksilver guitar navigating its way through the turbulence. The titular *Into The Nightwhale*, its insistent rhythmic pattern centred on one chord, nods back to *A Tower Struck Down* on *The Voyage Of The Acolyte*. It feels like a journey into oblivion. Is Travla, like Rael in *Cuckoo Cocoon*, going to end up as, *'Some sort of Jonah shut up inside the whale'*? Ultimately, being consumed by the metaphorical cetacean doesn't do him much harm. The penultimate track, the anthemic *Wherever You Are*, suggests that he is never out of reach of the song *'that can travel to the ends of the Earth'*, and that warm feeling is reinforced by strings and ecstatic lead guitar.

This is Hackett telling his own story thus far, and it's a moving conclusion to an allusive rollercoaster of an album – haunting, cryptic, exciting, disorientating. But if it had been more literal it would have lost some of its magic. The Spanish-flavoured acoustic guitar postscript *White Dove* shrugs off the preceding weight and worry, replacing it with a much longed-for feeling of liberation. It's a fitting end to Hackett's finest solo album to date.

BIG BIG TRAIN

The Likes Of Us INSIDEOUTMUSIC

There may be a new face on the footplate, but the route is familiar.

New Big Big Train singer Alberto Bravin was eased into position on last year's *Ingenious Devices*, tucked away at the end of the album on a live recording of 2021's *Atlantic Cable*. With the other tracks fronted by his predecessor, the late, much-loved David Longdon, this positioning felt like a carefully orchestrated step towards gentle transition and a changing of the guard. But it's Bravin's voice that introduces this follow-up, as if to emphasise the

> **An album of genuine warmth and quiet wonder.**

permanence of the shift and the trust the rest of the band have in their new hire.

By and large, that trust is rewarded. Bravin's voice is pure and pretty and pitched in the same range as Longdon's, so nothing's going to terrify the fans, but there are differences. Longdon was a naturally dramatic performer, and this drama was reflected most in his singing's euphoric highs. In these moments he sounded liberated, transcendent, and Bravin doesn't. Instead, he sounds as if he's concentrating, like an actor so committed to precisely annunciating his lines that his performance fails to truly soar. It's a smooth start, but a cautious one.

The Likes Of Us sounds like an album by a band regrouping and consolidating. On 2021's *Welcome To The Planet*, Longdon's final studio album with the band, there were moments — most notably on the title track, and on *Bats In The Belfry* — where all musical inhibitions seemed to be thrown to the wind. This album is frequently the opposite, as if Big Big Train are keen to reestablish a firm footing.

But it works. First single *Oblivion* is a reasonably straightforward rocker, but BBT have always done sharp and snappy alongside the long-form pieces, and the epics are here too. *Beneath The Masts* (17 minutes, 26 seconds) successfully transitions from gentle, piano-guided introduction to rapturous climax via a series of dizzying instrumental sections, some of them almost violent. The beginning of *Last Eleven* crashes in like *Dance On A Volcano*-era Genesis before slowly spiralling skywards, and bassist/founder Greg Spawton continues to conjure up the ghost of Chris Squire with his rumbling Rickenbacker.

There are also moments of genuine loveliness: the forlorn brass on opener *Light Left In The Day*, before the song goes a bit *Market Square Heroes*; the close harmonies on the introduction of *Miramare*; the swooping guitar solos on *Love Is The Light*, which finishes with a choral section perfectly crafted for mass audience singalongs. It's an album of genuine warmth and quiet wonder, and if it's a little safe, well, that's understandable.

FRASER LEWRY

ABSTRACT CONCRETE

Abstract Concrete THE STATE51 CONSPIRACY

Canterbury-tinged avant-pop masterpiece.

With a pedigree that includes Quiet Sun, Radar Favourites, This Heat and Camberwell Now, as well as a string of impressive solo releases, any project that drummer Charles Hayward engages with is worthy of attention.

Inflected with touches of dub, rock, lounge, quirky alt-pop and more than a few smart prog-friendly moves, this nimble quintet, drawn from the experimental and improv music scenes, present a melodically accessible and powerful six-track set. Deftly moving through warm harmonious breezes and euphoric convergences of gear-shifting rhythms, barbed guitar, rippling keyboards, violin and vocals, they are also prone to erupt into bone-shakingly obsessive bursts of manic repetition.

The septuagenarian Hayward's drumming has lost none of its urgency. Nor has age quelled his belligerent, contrarian whine of a voice. Whether fuelled by indignation at the hypocrisies in political and public life or rent with emotional fragility, his infectious vitality carries a weighty energy. Though not without humour or whimsical charm, *Abstract Concrete* is both deadly serious and spiritually uplifting. Music for our times, indeed. **SS**

ANYONE

Miracles In The Nothingness TOGETHERMENT

Cali prog maverick keeps expanding.

Californian visionary Riz Story has been operating under the Anyone moniker since the early 90s, initially as part of a trio with Jon Davison (now singer with Yes) and then-future Foo Fighters drummer Taylor Hawkins. Several reinventions later, Story has stretched his band's formula far beyond the prog-inclined alt-rock that typified their first few releases.

As with 2021's *In Humanity*, *Miracles In The Nothingness* combines virtuoso progressive rock with a syrupy strain of blissed-out psychedelia. Story plays every instrument across its two-hour runtime. Bristling with ambition, it feels less like an album than an experiential adventure. The intricate, rambling likes of *My Name Is Forever* are strong melodically, but Story's production is so full of textural tricks that the tunes seem secondary to the overwhelming trippiness of it all. On the languorous *Symptom Of The Miracle*, Jon Davison returns to the fold and his sonorous tenor soars across some of Story's most complex arrangements. It's a beautiful, barnstorming moment on an album that seeks to redefine modern prog as a prolonged sojourn in a high-spec flotation tank on a much more interesting planet than this one. **DL**

THE ARISTOCRATS

Duck THE-ARISTOCRATS-BAND.BANDCAMP.COM

Illustrious fusion trio embrace the absurd with thrill-a-minute concept album.

The three musos who make up The Aristocrats have been involved with more albums than most of us have had hot dinners, but they've never written anything like *Duck* before. A less-than-serious concept album, it centres around a cartoon duck who, chased out of the Antarctic by a malevolent penguin policeman, goes on to explore the world. *The Wall* this is not.

As with their previous records, each member has written three tracks. *The Aristoclub*'s flashing disco grooves sees Guthrie Govan sprinkling spicy guitar between bursts of its infectious motif, while on *Sideshow*, Bryan Beller's bright bass lines intertwine with Govan's pattering licks. *Sgt Rockhopper*, named after the avian antagonist, benefits from establishing its hooks before gorging on modulating rhythms and fretboard acrobatics. Drummer Marco Minnemann offers a smooth R&B swing throughout, with the wah-lathered *Sittin' With A Duck On A Bay* a particular highlight.

For all that, *Duck* does occasionally suffer from the trio's virtuosity overshadowing the needs of their songs. As a result, its sillier, free-spirited moments are the ones that leave a lasting impression. **POW**

THE BEVIS FROND

Focus On Nature FIRE RECORDS

Almost 40 years in and the creativity still flows like water.

Much like the Shroud of Turin or the Bermuda Triangle, the ongoing cult status of The Bevis Frond – aka founder and sole constant member Nick Saloman – remains a mystery that is unlikely to be solved any time soon.

Those who've followed this hugely prolific artist will know what to expect. Namely guitar freak-outs (*Mr Fred's Disco*), six-string pop (*Here For The Other One*) and state-of-the-world meditations (*Focus On Nature*) filtered through a psychedelic prism that's at once welcoming if slightly disorientating. Indeed, such is the immediacy at play throughout the 19 songs that make up this album, it's hard to believe that this isn't a 'The Very Best Of' compilation. Conversely, neophytes will be wondering why they've been missing out since the band's mid-80s inception.

Saloman's ability to balance serious concerns with a sense of familiarity is to be commended. *Heat* takes a microscope to climate change against a backdrop of discordant guitars and sonic sweeps, while the beautiful *Maybe We Got It Wrong* shakes a weary head at the here and now. Flab-free and finely balanced, *Focus On Natures* more than justifies taking up two slabs of vinyl. **JM**

ENSEMBLE EX MATERIA

Ensemble Ex Materia ARPAVIVA RECORDINGS

Parisian avant-garde four-piece ensemble with Cageian turntables.

The Latin 'ex materia' concerns the Platonic idea that life is created out of matter, rather than the heavens and the Earth being created out of nothing (ex nihilo). That definition is pertinent to Parisian electro-acoustic act Ensemble Ex Materia, in that their improvisational whims are in response to stimuli rather than pulled out of thin air.

Harpist Victoria Jordanova, pianist Peter Vukmirovic Stevens and trombone player Jérôme Descamps react to the prepared turntables of Swiss musician Strotter Inst (aka Christopher Hess). What emerge on this self-titled debut are intriguing sonic tapestries of atmospheric music full of tangential passages and moments of uncomfortable quietude. Hess's drones inspire obliqueness on the brave and fascinating opener *Lightning Falls On Low Places*, while the concluding track *The Mother Of Crime* is the most accessible – if that's the right word – with diaphanous harps and drawn out, processed trombone unravelling and warping as the piece unfolds, all offset by an ominous thrum throughout. It's music that's certainly conducive to thought and introspection. **JA**

IHSAHN

Ihsahn CANDLELIGHT

Extreme metal meets orchestral ambition across twin albums.

Former Emperor frontman turned prog-metal voyager Ihsahn's self-titled eighth album is the closest he's got to coming full circle. Or at least half of it is. The ambitious conceit here is that he's recorded two versions of the same set of songs – one that's heavy on the kind of sore-throated metal he made with his original band, the other an entirely orchestral and vocal-free reimagining.

The former will be most startling, and potentially off-putting, to those only familiar his solo work. While it's not unapproachable, it's heavier and denser than most of his solo work, and his gargled vocals are uncompromisingly brutal for the most part. The orchestral version is harder to connect with in a different way – impressive in scale and skill, for sure, but lacking the visual component that gives its inspirations their power.

Separating out these two musical strands is a bold artistic choice, but Ihsahn works better when they're combined, as on the stirring *The Distance Between Us* and *At The Heart Of All Things Broken* (both, not uncoincidentally, featuring 'clean' vocals). A success on its own terms, but not necessarily for everyone. **DEV**

MIDAS FALL

Cold Waves Divide Us MONOTREME

Scottish soundscapists' beefed-up but still brooding return.

In an era when Spotify divides up the world of music into more than 6,000 genres, all bets are off when trying to narrow down music to specific spheres of influence and identifiable sonic signifiers. So when Midas Fall describe themselves as "alt/post-rock" as they present their fifth album, it could pretty much mean anything.

And while their widescreen rock visions retain the impressionistic instrumental impact that characterised previous releases, they've reinforced their sound (which not so long ago they half-jokingly called "miserable prog") on this first release for six years, and cranked up the vocal melodrama. The results see them verge on symphonic metal redolent of Nightwish or Within Temptation as much as previous comparison pointed to Mogwai and Sigur Rós.

> **Whichever way the mood swings, it's all-embracing.**

The addition of multi-instrumentalist Michael Hamilton to the founding duo of vocalist Elizabeth Heaton and guitarist Rowan Burn has added heft to the sound, and the electronic pulses of 2018's *Evaporate* are less in evidence, replaced by slow-built but increasingly monolithic noise sculptures over which Heaton emotes more stridently than ever.

It's an irresistible formula on *In The Morning We'll Be Someone Else* and *Little Wooden Boxes,* in which Heaton's yearning meditations gather momentum and sweep the listener up in the emotional swell, while subtle stripes of orchestral accompaniment further sharpen the picture.

It's not always such a linear journey from quiet to loud, however. *Mute* draws the listener in with a conspiratorial semi-whispered vocal, while the stuttering drums on *I Am Wrong* crank up the emotional uncertainty. Meanwhile, the crackling sonic jetsam that opens *Point Of Diminishing Return* bursts into passages of muscular synth rock reinforced by pummelling bass drums that hint at a right turn into more metallic territory. But then an increasing swell of sculpted noise suggests this is a band that will always feel most at home within the high walls of shoegaze. Heaton's imploring voice imbues *Monster* with a sense of desperation, her tones cracking and shuddering, while icicles of guitar drip from the roof of another cavernous sonic chamber.

The mood, for the most part, is uncompromisingly melancholic, but there is light amid the despair. Most noticeably when *In This Avalanche* sees Heaton sounding positively lovestruck as she sings of *'lying next to you'* and taking comfort from the fact that *'It's the weight of the world but I know I'm with you.'* So not quite "miserable prog" throughout, then. But whichever way the mood swings, it's rarely less than all-embracing.

JOHNNY SHARP

THE PINEAPPLE THIEF

It Leads To This KSCOPE

Modern prog mainstays return with sombre yet impressive album.

Before drummer Gavin Harrison joined in 2016, Bruce Soord's fragile, introspective songwriting had established The Pineapple Thief as a solid, if not show-stopping modern progressive rock outfit. With Harrison's intricate imagination mingling with Soord's fluid musical landscapes, the band have grown into so much more.

Interestingly, the magic on *It Leads To This* lies in the record's tonal ambiguity. If their three previous albums can

> **Touches of beauty and snarl make the songs' turmoil worth it.**

be compared to the weather then 2016's *Your Wilderness* was desert sunshine on a still day, 2018's *Dissolution* a cold winter's night, and 2020's *Versions of the Truth* an overcast morning in between showers of rain. Their latest leaves the listener guessing as to whether its half-light skies are about to brighten into a new day or fall into an impenetrable darkness as its songs, which rise and fall around five minutes apiece, offer pensiveness and bite in balanced measure.

Every Trace Of Us begins with wavering clean guitars that are pushed through a vibrato effect before spilling into grooves that are musically optimistic, but lyrically pessimistic as Soord sings about cutting *'a desperate figure through my heart... tearing every trace of us apart'*. *Now It's Yours* is the bleakest track, distorting a smooth 60s guitar motif with droning chords and a towering sense of despair, its elongated and expressive solo well placed to offer respite. Indeed, throughout the record, which includes *The Frost*'s mangled blues rock riff and *Rubicon*'s agitated, overdriven rhythms, TPT find a way to take dark, heavy turns without unsettling the tenderness of the music. It's all in the weight of the emotion and the grit beneath the riffs, which often threaten to explode but are purposefully held back.

These songs have been in the works for three years, with Soord admitting it's growing ever harder to define what it is to be satisfied with the end product. He says he was pushed well beyond his creative limits as he, Harrison, bassist Jon Sykes and keyboardist Steve Kitch searched for that sensation. Thankfully, the slow-burning results offer touches of nuance, beauty and snarl to make their turmoil worth it. *Put It Right* and *To Forget* top and tail the album with the barest performances, the prior defined by slowly wrung-out piano chords and Soord's ruminating vocals, the latter characterised by rich acoustic guitars and swaying dynamics.

Together, they typify the record's reserved songwriting, with these songs woven together with patience and care. No crescendo arrives unwarranted and no twist in the narrative detracts from the bigger picture: The Pineapple Thief have delivered a classy and very sombre collection.

PHIL WELLER

JANE GETTER PREMONITION

Division World ESOTERIC

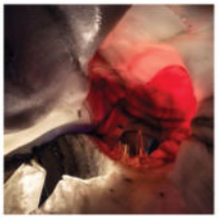
Genre-blending virtuoso reins in excesses.

Acclaimed guitarist Jane Getter's skills are undeniable. Generally over her career she's made the kind of slick, seductive jazz fusion which recalls Jeff Beck's mid-70s albums such as *Blow By Blow*, but her last, *Anomalia*, also leaned into heavier prog and metal directions. Here she resets focus again, delivering more compact songs and fewer lengthy instrumentals. It's a success. While the lyrics highlight the divisions of the modern world, the music powers along with polished playing and, of course, Getter's insanely fluid, rarely indulgent solos. With a high-calibre band including keyboardist Adam Holzman and metal-shredder-turned-jazz guitarist Alex Skolnick, *Division World* shares a sonic glow with Steven Wilson's solo output that guarantees subtle, slow-burning dazzle. While the title track sets out the album's dominant strain with mid-tempo, melody-driven light prog building to inevitable hot guitar action, *Rewind Regain* mixes dreamy reverie with Zeppelin-tinged dynamics and *Another Way* floats on eerie, echoey waves, albeit with added shredding. It's perhaps a sign of how solid the songs are that a jam work-out like *Compass* feels like filler. Impressive. **CR**

KRISTOFFER GILDENLÖW

Empty NEW JOKE MUSIC

Contemplative and haunting art-rock odes from the Swedish songsmith.



Kristoffer Gildenlöw's solo work often strikes an even balance between his singular artistry and the peculiarities of his former band, Pain Of Salvation. That's true on *Empty*. A darker and heavier record than its predecessor, 2021's ethereal *Let Me Be A Ghost*, it sees the Swede sceptically examining the frivolousness of modern humanity.

Its nature is apparent on opener *Time To Turn The Page*, whose sparse first half erupts into a full-bodied blues/prog rock jam by the end. Elsewhere, Gildenlöw taps into a considerably wide array of styles. The gently meditative *End Of Their Road*, *The Brittle Man* and *Black & White* are particularly engrossing, especially when juxtaposed with the hypnotic guitar riffs and rhythms of the chaotic *Harbinger Of Sorrow*. Equally representative are the contrasts between the disturbingly avant-garde/classical *Turn It All Around* and the colourful liveliness of follow-up *Beautiful Decay*.

It's all thoroughly challenging, ambitious and rewarding stuff, allowing Gildenlöw to double down on the intellectual and musical adventurousness he does so well. **JMB**

ISILDURS BANE & JINIAN WILDE

The Pearl Of Ever Changing Shell ATARAXIA

Scandinavian collab specialists come up with a pearler.

Swedish prog veterans Isildurs Bane have a knack of choosing the right singers to work with them. Having previously enlisted Steve Hogarth and Peter Hammill, Jinian Wilde steps up to the plate this time. Best known as the vocalist in the David Cross Band, he has a fine, earnest, 80s-style pop/rock voice, which works well in the more straight-ahead likes of *Sign Of The Times (The Calling)*, but turns out to be equally effective amid the more detailed soundscapes.

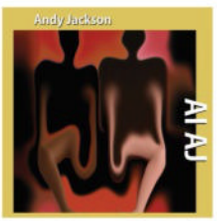
The often percussive feel of the music, with Klas Assarsson's marimba and vibraphone prominent, add to the depth of the musical canvas. *Sailing Home (The Following)* combines choral vocals with jagged electronica. The plaintive, piano-led *Lifetimes (The Remembering)* is pleasingly reminiscent of Kate Bush circa *The Sensual World*, with Wilde's intricate vocal melody matched by elegant orchestral counterpoints.

Best of all is the eight-and-a-half minute *Born Afraid*, a labyrinthine piece with swirling woodwind sections, led to a powerful climax by keyboardist/producer/musical director Mats Johansson. A quirkily atmospheric addition to a fine catalogue. **PGI**

ANDY JACKSON

AI AJ ESOTERIC

Floyd engineer tackles hot topic on fourth studio set.



Following 2023's instrumental *Twelve Half Steps*, the long-time Pink Floyd studio lieutenant drops this nine-track album which, as the title suggests, takes a current cause celebre as its theme.

And he's found his voice again... or at least *a* voice. She goes by the name of Natalie 103, but it's unclear if she's a studio construct in keeping with the AI concept, or a human singer whose tones have been digitally treated. She sounds soulful and warm on the comfortingly Floydian *300 Seconds*, yet the lyrics suggest something is afoot. '*I know what you think better than you,*' she insists haughtily. On *For The Best* she sounds somehow detached, as if her empathy is ebbing away. Jackson's expressive guitar and warm organ accompaniment suggest a more organic force is battling for prominence as a plaintive top-line melody keeps pressing emotional buttons.

Maybe the battle's being lost, though, as the album's latter stages see altogether bleaker sonic vistas dominate. Final track *The Lifting Of The Veil* manages to make austere industrial stabs of sound resemble a crowd chanting "Hail! Hail!" Chilling, but maybe that's the whole point. **JS**

DAVID JACKSON AND RENÉ VAN COMMENÉE

Keep Your Lane TALKING ELEPHANT

Sax and drums and experimental prog'n'roll.

Following a long association as live and studio collaborators, sax maestro David Jackson and Dutch percussionist René van Commenée regroup for some warm, energetic and otherworldly workouts to complete some long-gestating instrumental works-in-progress.

The style and approach has much in common with London jazz-electronica blasters The Comet Is Coming as well as Soft Machine, van Commenée's rich, sonorous sound design holding the thrumming threads of *KYL* together. Naturally, given Jackson's background, the VdGG force is strong, and *H To He*'s *Pioneers Over C* appears alongside a version of Le Orme's *Felona* (written by Peter Hammill). Elsewhere, there's a sax chaconne slowed-up, baroque-chimed cover of Moondog's *Bird's Lament*, a quirky, bubbling tribute to Black Widow flautist Clive Jones (*Garden Shed*) and a bright, stately take on the Victorian hymn of freedom and exploration, *Hills Of The North*.

Colin Edwin makes himself known via the evil sub-bass on *Pinball Potter*, and Christmas tune *Gateway* certainly made this writer feel more festive pre-Yule – a third-stream/new age rondo that switches to drum'n'bass midway. **JK**

K'MONO

Mind Out Of Mind APOLLON

Minneapolis trio take on the concept album and run with it.

K'mono are not afraid to embrace their inner prog – or their outer prog, for that matter. *Mind Out Of Mind*, their second album, doffs a cap to 70s progressive rock, 80s progressive pop and even some progressive jazz too, as they take us on a conceptual journey about a deposed king, all conjured up by frontmen Jeffrey Carlson and Chad Fjerstad.

Opening with the title track, they slip expeditiously into a 10/8 time signature, wander off via an ethereal coda, and then ride back in again on *Discipline*-era King Crimson guitar riffs followed by a scything synth solo. It's a thrusting, thrilling nine-and-a-half minutes that embraces musical audaciousness without fear and reproach, naturally. *Millipede Man* pays musical homage to early Genesis with its fitful ostinatos, *Tell Me The Lore* is fabulously funky with squelchy claviers and slap bass while *Time Will Tell...* even genuflects to mediaeval heraldry in keeping with the concept.

K'mono bring enough originality to the table to ensure that none of it feels like pastiche and, in *Mind Out Of Mind*, they've thrown down a bold gauntlet that suggest they're going for the throne. **JA**

VON HERTZEN BROTHERS

Live At Tavastia VONHERTZENBROTHERS.COM

Finnish siblings deliver debut live album with mixed results.

The live album ain't what it used to be. The days of the in-concert record as monumental cultural artefact are long gone, this once essential rite of musical passage replaced in recent times by the glut of live-in-front-of-no-one lockdown releases spawned by the pandemic — financially necessary, for sure, but unlikely to prop up any Greatest Live Albums Of All Time lists.

> **Ultimately, they're left standing on the shoulders of giants.**

Respect to the Von Hertzen Brothers for upholding tradition. They opted to record their first-ever live album in front of a living, breathing, presumably sweaty audience in February 2023 at Helsinki's historic Tavastia club, a 700-capacity venue that occupies pretty much the same place in the Finnish musical firmament as the Marquee once did in the British equivalent. For a bunch of native sons schooled to the great live albums of the 70s, the resulting 13-track record feels as much like a personal document as a statement of intent, something underlined by the fact that all the between-song banter is in Finnish (and why wouldn't it be?).

So does *Live At Tavastia* deserve to be measured against the classics? Yes... and no. Musically, the Von Hertzen Brothers — lead vocalist/guitarist Mikko, guitarist Kie and bassist Jonne, joined here by keyboard player Robert Engstrand and drummer Sami Kuoppamäki — have always been tighter than a moose's chuffer in a howling blizzard, and this is no exception. *Day Of Reckoning*, *Jerusalem*, *Flowers And Rust* and the magnificent, 10-minute *Peace Patrol* are muscular and sinuous, walking the line between power and grace, even if the astounding saxophone break that kicked the latter track to another level on record is absent, its part replicated a less impactful though doubtless cheaper keyboard line. And the web of vocal harmonies the brothers spin remains superhumanly impressive, their voices wrapping their way around each other in the way that only siblings can.

But *Live At Tavastia* ultimately falls short of greatness. There's a rawness and closeness to the sound that doesn't deliver the grandeur their music deserves. The point of live albums isn't to replicate the gleam of an expensive studio, but some polish wouldn't have gone amiss, not least when it comes to Mikko's vocals. The boy can sing, no question, but there are moments when he audibly strains for the big notes without nailing them. Warts and all is admirable, but some of those warts could do with a little concealer occasionally.

Well into their third decade as a band, the VHB have more than earned the right to indulge themselves in a little self-congratulation in the shape of a live album. But ultimately, they're left standing on the shoulders of giants.

DAVE EVERLEY

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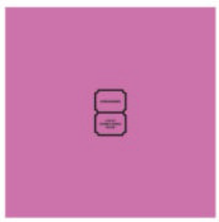
KHRUANGBIN

Live At The Sidney Opera House DEAD OCEANS

Coffee-table psychedelia to soundtrack hip dinner parties.



By making so little go such a long way – funky bass lines, mid-paced beats, cooing vocals and an over-reliance on delay and wah-wah pedals – Texan psych trio Khruangbin are the ultimate cost-of-living-crisis band. Sadly, they lack the variety to maintain interest over this live album's 90 minutes.

Recorded at the Sydney Opera House, the band dig in deep with *The Number 3* to the evident approval of their fanbase. And yet, by sticking to their rigid formula, the songs soon start blending into one another. The overall effect is akin to listening to music floating in from another room no matter how high the volume is turned up. Shorn of the band's celebrated visual presentation, the music struggles to differentiate from one song to another.

The album isn't totally without merit, though. *Pelota* moves with vaguely Latin rhythms while *People Everywhere* vaguely touches on the pumping dynamics of rave music, but all too often, Khruangbin are vague. The languid pace switches up a few gears with *Lady And Man* but when singer-bassist Laura Lee and guitarist Marko sing, *'I could've been a doctor, I could've been a lawyer'*, it's hard not to sigh and think, "If only." **JM**

KYROS

Mannequin WHITE STAR RECORDS

Brit proggers dive deep into the synthwave.

Returning with their first album of original music since 2020's *Celexa Dreams*, UK quartet Kyros go further and faster with *Mannequin*, building on their synthpop-meets-prog baseplate to create glittering new sonic experiences. It's buzzing with excitement, offering densely layered arrangements and big, catchy hooks.

It begins almost deceptively with the gentle acoustics of *Taste The Day*, but thereafter the synths charge to the front and stay there. *Esoterica* is built around a keyboard refrain that could work in a house track, yet that's accompanied by expansive, proggy soloing. *Ghosts Of You* adds 90s new-jack swing and R&B to the palette, while *Digital Fear* sounds like an extract from an 80s John Carpenter soundtrack.

However, its not just retro revivalism. While *Technology Killed The Kids IV* begins with the sound of an old internet dial-up connection, the track asserts its modernity with heavy, djent-style riffing. *The End In Mind* is a kaleidoscope of video game music, prog metal guitar and jubilant synthpop. The perfect album for throwing an uproarious prog rock dance party that's sure to have the neighbours banging on the walls. **DW**

MADDER MORTEM

Old Eyes, New Heart DARK ESSENCE RECORDS

A dark rainbow of delights from Norwegian prog-metal veterans.

Madder Mortem's last album, *Marrow*, came out in 2018, so the Norwegian five-piece are clearly not a group to be hurried along. Happily, *Old Eyes, New Heart* proves more than worth the wait.

Their eighth album, it sees the band painting in dark colours on a wide canvas and while the vibe can be melancholic, there are moments when light pierces the gloom to lift the spirits. This is employed to great effect in the elegant *Here And Now*. Agnete M Kirkevaag remains one of the most captivating, underrated vocalists in progressive metal, from the strident energy she brings to *Towers* to the wailing roar that opens *Master Tongue* with a burst of black metal.

The songwriting and musicianship are impressive throughout. *On Guard* has a heavy blues vibe and slide guitar, there's punchy alt metal in *Unity*, while *Things I'll Never Do* begins as a galloping up-tempo banger before downshifting into doomy prog metal. There's a gothic grandeur to *Cold Hard Rain* and the album's closer, *Long Road*, is a beautiful ode to finding hope in the face of loss. This is thrilling stuff that deserves to give Madder Mortem the acclaim they've long deserved. **DW**

ART-ROCK

Chris Roberts samples the new releases on the prog/rock boundary.

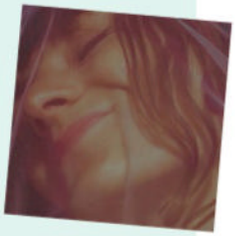
Ever since exploding across 2007 with their debut album *Oracular Spectacular*, **MGMT** have defied gravity. Labelled everything from neo-psychedelia to hipster indie, they've worked with ex-members of Mercury Rev and Spacemen 3 yet drawn fans like McCartney and Springsteen. Even when it appeared their bubble had burst, their 2018 track *Little Dark Age* became a sleeper pandemic hit. They return with a fifth album — "running at 20 per cent adult contemporary", they quip — and of course it's a gleaming, beaming blend of sincerity and irony. *Loss Of Life* (Mom + Pop) has that Flaming Lips aura of emotion filtered through cerebral jokes, but is so energised and twitchy — from glam to folk to woozy prog, from a Christine And The Queens cameo to a song begging a *'bubblegum dog'* to tell the truth — that it's irresistible.

As is the marriage of passion and precision which characterises the latest from Baltimore's **Future Islands**, whose *People Who Aren't There Anymore* (4AD) deploys their signature amalgam of mannered yet touching vocals and Moroder-ogles-rock synthpop. There's an accumulative effect to their insistent testifying, and *Give Me The Ghost Back* dispels demons as the line *'here come the stars again'* radiates with hope.

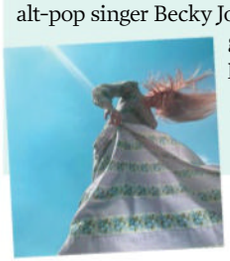
Ed Harcourt is a one-man alternative orchestra with a voice that just won't quit. *El Magnifico* (Deathless) might be the pinnacle of an extraordinary career which has taken in apocalyptic anthems and minimalist instrumentals. Ravishingly self-produced, his 11th album is song-centric art-rock at its most literate and baroque, whether stomping or whispering. Greg Dulli and Kathryn Williams guest. A strange, cinematic beauty is found amid musings on mortality, love and Hiroshima rain.

The Miserable Rich have prevailed over genuine personal tragedy to create their first album in 13 years, *Overcome* (Rags To Ruin). The Brighton group are, happily, uncategorisable, coasting between synthpop as intriguing as Everything Everything or Alt-J and string-soused quasi-folk. Lightness of touch allows them to probe themes both sorrowful and surreal (the captivating *Crows* has a touch of Hitchcock). A wealth of affirmation.

French singer/musician/producer **Halo Maud** won new fans as a vocalist on The Chemical Brothers' recent album, but don't expect block rockin' beats on *Celebrate* (Heavenly). Her own work, which she bafflingly claims is inspired by Tarkovsky's film *Stalker*, is a thoroughly charming spin through ecstatic dream pop, subverted Ye-Ye tropes, pensiveness and partying.



On her fourth album *Sunseeker* (VLF Records) **Saint Saviour** (aka English alt-pop singer Becky Jones, with ex-Coral guitarist Bill Ryder-Jones producing) prefers to drape her reflections over sleepy folk, which breaks into tasteful bursts of bonhomie. It may be winter in Blighty, but sun is sourced.



RICK WAKEMAN

Live At The London Palladium 2023 FRAGILE/ESOTERIC

Grumpy old Yes man's solo classics refreshed.

Writing in the sleeve notes of this four-disc box, Rick Wakeman admits he initially didn't think the concerts captured here would work. Two back-to-back shows at London's iconic Palladium, the first combining *The Six Wives Of Henry VIII* with *The Myths And Legends Of King Arthur*, and the second a spruced-up selection of Yes 'hits' with *Journey To The Centre Of The Earth* (the chart-topping pinnacle of his career to date).

> **The fluidity, precision and phrasing is simply dazzling.**

It was a mammoth task involving significant work on the core material (with no orchestra involved, *King Arthur...* and *Journey...* had to be rearranged for his stalwart live band, the English Rock Ensemble). Not to mention the daunting prospect of rehearsing over 200 minutes of unfeasibly complex balls-out mega-prog. Considering that staging a fraction of this material nearly killed him while still a hale and hearty 25-year-old (three 'minor' heart attacks followed his Crystal Palace *Journey...* show of 1974), this must have been off the charts for the 73-year-old.

The most striking attribute of the maestro at centre-stage, all cape and trousers, is just how adept he is when it comes to hammering away at a keyboard. While it's not news that Wakeman can play a bit, the fluidity, precision and phrasing that flows, apparently instinctively, from the opening bars of *Six Wives...*'s *Catherine Of Aragon* to the closing crescendo of *Journey...*'s *Mount Etna*, is simply dazzling.

This version of *Six Wives...* has been generously expanded by 13 minutes, and its abundant palette of styles (from syncopated Emerson jazz noodles to blousy Elton kitsch) showcase Wakeman's virtuosity to jaw-flooring effect, while *King Arthur...* has been flawlessly adapted from all-guns-blazing orchestral Wagnerathon to lithe, ice-show-free, quintet-and-choir conceptual rock show while losing none of its central themes or intrinsic drama.

Disc three, billed as *Classic Yes*, is most notable for the fact that (as with the entire set), the lead vocals, more usually associated with Jon Anderson, are sung by Hayley Sanderson (AKA her off of TV's *Strictly Come Dancing*). For purists, a bit of a shocker, but Sanderson's strident purity on *Roundabout* and *Wonderous Stories* — now embedded in a broader Yes 'Suite' — is hard to fault. And *Journey To The Centre Of The Earth*? It's the jewel in Rick's crown, frankly. Fabulously oversold by its deliciously fruity Peter Egan narration, this pacily edited 50-minute thrill ride incorporates significant chunks of its 2012 re-record, alongside its unashamedly camp, chorally-swollen original setting. Beautifully captured, flawlessly realised, an essential package.

IAN FORTNAM

MESAVERDE

All Is Well APOLLON

Oslo art-rockers stray into muzak territory.

Norwegian quartet MesaVerde conjure the spirit and sound of 80s art-rock on their second album. Where their debut album, 2022's *KY*, offered a mix of tracks led by guitar and keyboard, this time the arrangements mark a shift towards favouring vocalist Jonas Lundekvam's synthesisers. Henrik Schmidt's guitar still asserts a presence in songs like *Tracing* and the angular riff of *Pyramid Fucksnake*, but *Pickings For The Beast* is all about those keys and Lars Fremmerlid's funky bass line.

Jørgen Apeness's drums inhabit that space between dance and rock beloved of bands like New Order, with a fat, thudding sound and machine-like steadiness. *Deep Time* is one of the stronger tracks with its disco meets New Romantic vibe. Two touchstones would be Talk Talk and Japan, in terms of the production and a shared sensibility for combining elements from art-rock and pop music.

What lets it down is a lack of memorable hooks and compelling melodies. The likes of *Eva* and *Eyes* seem content to work as unobtrusive background music, rather than commanding the attention. *All Is Well* is pleasant on the ears but doesn't make a deep impression in its passing. **DW**

CLIVE MITTEN

Tales From A Misspent Youth - Volume II BUM NOTE

A second curious collection of light orchestral covers from neo-prog luminary.

Released in 2022, Clive Mitten's two-disc *Tales From A Misspent Youth* saw the former Twelfth Night man applying classical/orchestral approaches to prog classics. With *Volume II* Mitten presents another two hours of covers, which includes more major prog such as *Tarkus*, a Genesis medley and the whole of *Close To The Edge*.

Mainly piano-centric but utilising the sounds of various string and woodwind combinations, occasional organ and some tuned percussion (many of Anderson's vocals in *Close To The Edge* are rendered here as vibraphone and xylophone), it must surely have been an impressively painstaking process working out the arrangements, time signatures and melodies.

It is in the more involved and complex tunes that the approach seems to work best – *Tarkus* and the back-and-forth King Crimson segue of *Discipline/Frame By Frame* feel suitably breathless and compelling. Interesting as an experiment in reimagining Mitten's influences perhaps, however, as these tracks are for rock band, vocals and lyrics, and with very obviously programmed drums throughout, these renditions often fall short of the drama and dynamism of the originals. **GMM**

NEAL MORSE

The Restoration - Joseph: Part Two FRONTIERS

Former Spock's Beard man concludes his latest biblical epic.

A born-again Christian since 2002, Neal Morse has long sought divine inspiration. Rock operas such as 2019's *Jesus Christ The Exorcist* and 2023's *The Dreamer: Joseph Part One* came on like prog's answer to Andrew Lloyd Webber, and *The Restoration – Joseph: Part Two follows suit.*

Listening to opener *Cosmic Mess*, wherein the close-miked sound of a buzzing fly gives way to an astonishing, rapid-fire lattice of piano, bass and guitar all played by Morse, there's no denying the boldness of his vision. And that's before vocal harmonies and Sly Stone-like brass kick-in.

Elsewhere, moments of simple, hard-rock heft (*I Hate My Brothers*) are interspersed with a capella vocal canons (the Jethro-Tull-go-baroque-like *The Argument*). Equally audacious is *All Hail*, an unlikely stylistic merger which conjures Pink Floyd collaborating with Jim Steinman.

Morse's telling of Joseph's story is sometimes enunciated in melodramatic tones reminiscent of Jack Black's Tenacious D, yet much of this record astounds, and in a good way. Members of Spock's Beard, Theocracy, Haken and Proto-Kaw assist the biblically Broadway-esque mood. **JMN**

PLANTOID

Terrapath BELLA UNION

Debut release from London four-piece follows its own prog agenda.

Terrapath is the debut album from London-via-Lincoln four-piece, and it's a corker. Not only does it announce a vibrant new talent on the scene, it also effortlessly demonstrates there's plenty of life left in the progressive idea beyond just slavishly reproducing genre tropes. There are references to past luminaries, but Plantoid showcase a sound and vision here that's completely their own.

Key to both are Chloe Spence's powerfully ethereal voice and Tom Coyne's shape-shifting guitar work, which moves fluidly from jazzy chording to spiky hard-rock riffing. The songs range widely, too, but there's a sense of being taken on a journey. The mellifluous picking of *Is That You* is followed by the glorious headlong rush of *Pressure*, like a sparkly Cardiacs. *Modulator* begins as dreamy yet propulsive lounge prog, but twists and turns into Gentle Giant territory by its conclusion; the brittle funk of *Dog's Life* could be Prince battling it out with King Crimson. And then the big three-song suite of *Wander/Wonder*, *Insomniac* and *G.Y. Drift* moves from sinuous utopian vibes to choppy mechanical grooves. The sound of a band with absolute confidence in their own abilities. **JB**

RURAL TAPES

Contact SMUGGLER MUSIC

Norwegian multi-instrumentalist goes digging for tape treasures.

Arne Kjelsrud Mathisen has taken a glimpse at the future and he doesn't like it. On his third album as Rural Tapes, he's returned to analogue with a vengeance, flicking his Vs at the oncoming AI revolution.

Mathisen plays organ, Mellotron, synth, piano, drums, zither, metallophone, tuba and that's only the half of it. He has been snapping up old tape recorders and reel-to-reel machines wherever he goes, joking that he stopped buying records in every city he's on tour in to instead mine for sounds found on those old pieces of technology. The largely instrumental *Contact* presents us with random voices captured from the past. *Tape Collage* splices together dialects and phonemes without introduction or explanation, while *Waves* presents lost messages that take on an uncanny quality.

Albums predicated on field recordings and tapes usually revel in textural atmospheres, whereas Mathisen embraces melody in a variety of ways. The 11-minute opener *Patchwork* is a frenzy of machine noise, drones and his band clattering away like they're the new Neu!, while conversely, *Opus 1* and the enchanting, sprawling *Run Rapid* provide plenty of musicality to savour. **JA**

SENDELICA

Man, Myth & Magic FRUITS DE MER

Space-rock stalwarts start a psilocybin-fire.

Welsh space rock die-hards Sendelica's follow-up to 2022's unusually succinct *One Man's Man...* is an expansive affair comprising four gargantuan jams that practically roll their own spliffs.

Wheel Of Fortune is a drone-driven entry point with numerous hazy detours that add atmosphere to Sendelica's often machine-like repetition. A relative tiddler at 17 minutes, it morphs seamlessly into *Neptune (The Hanged Man)*, an epic drift through rippling ambient waters, with a starry-eyed krautrock pulse. *Magician Dawn* veers into the left-field with 20 minutes of formless noise, with a clattering garage band payoff. The closing *Tower Of Chaos* is stranger still, with stuttering acoustic guitars lost in a reverb-haunted hall-of-mirrors and the plaintive cry of saxophone cast across a treacly miasma of synths and bass. As the fog dissipates, tension turns to tranquillity, as instruments glide around each other, assailed by treated electronics and spectral drones.

Sendelica are established masters of this stuff, but even by their usual standards, *Man, Myth & Magic* is an out-there proposition. **DL**

PROGRESSIVE FOLK

Paul Sexton travels from Mexico to Wales in the latest bucolic grab-bag.

Andrew Rumsey's self-released *Evensongs* starts by climbing up on Wiltshire's *Silbury Hill*, a little way east of Mr Gabriel's more celebrated location. Rumsey's softly authoritative voice and acoustic style echo some of the bastions with whom he has worked, such as Martin Carthy and Robyn Hitchcock.

Comprising eight songs of uniform charm and unspoiled directness, the album was recorded live on a summer's day in a remote 12th-century church in the Wiltshire parish of Ham. Rumsey is also the bishop of nearby Ramsbury, and the record accompanies and complements his book *English Grounds: A Pastoral Journal*, praised in such lofty circles as *The Guardian* and *The Times Literary Supplement*. Both noble ventures can be purchased at Bandcamp.

Toronto singer-songwriter **Shirley Hurt**'s unusual voice and inquisitively wide-ranging style hint at everyone from June Tabor to Kate Bush. Her self-titled debut, released in late 2022 by Telephone Explosion but newly licensed to Melodic, boasts a genre-crossing mystique in which base ingredients of keyboards and acoustic guitar are seasoned with low-key indie-folk sass. *Problem Child*, with its quarter-million-plus streams, opens the window to a full-length of assured, intriguing and often mesmeric delicacy.

Joining Hurt at the ethereal end of town is **Jess Haines**'s *The Laughing Man*, also on Bandcamp. The opening title track establishes a blend of traditional and transcendental that conjures a more stripped-back version of early Pentangle. Haines's vocals have a winning intimacy heightened by simple casting opposite acoustic guitar, on original, melancholic lyrical portraits such as *The Nanny* and *Monday Comes, Another Nail Breaks*.

Industry vet Alejandro Barba, who goes by **Dellarge** on record, offers *INRI* (Modern Obscure Music), the title standing for Industria Nacional Del Ruido Infinito. Its electronic experimentation is fuelled by the beauty of Lake Pátzcuaro in Michoacan, Mexico, where he makes music reflecting humanity's inspiring highs and darkest lows. At times, as on the opening *Viaje Al Sol*, it's pure BBC Radiophonic Workshop, in the best way, and Dellarge speaks of influences including Kraftwerk, Can and sci-fi staples such as *Neuromancer* and *Dune*. Each track is designed as a separate adventure, but as a collective 16, they form a futuristic tapestry.

Another notable nom de disque is **Bitw**, or Gruff ab Arwel, whose *Rehearse* (Klep Dim Trep) draws on his track record with Welsh surf instrumentalists Y Niwl and as string arranger on Gruff Rhys's brand new *Sadness Sets Me Free*. Indeed, Bitw's record is often reminiscent of Gruff's melodic psych-pop both in and out of Super Furry Animals. The bubbling, Moroder-ish synth lines of *Head For A Hometown* make it a veritable toe-tapper, and *Pretender* is catchy as you like, while others like *When I Was You* and *The Rust* both have dreamy appeal.

RICHARD WILEMAN

The Forked Road BELIEVERS ROAST

Fourth solo album from the Karda Estra king.

Whether recording as a solo artist or under his long-standing Karda Estra banner, Richard Wileman has always been an unpredictable and wildly imaginative soul. Having plundered everything from chamber music and avant-garde classical to off-kilter folk and abstract noise in the past, the esoteric composer seems to have settled on a hazily defined identity here. *The Forked Road* is a folk-horror concept album with a progressive streak several

> **A folk-horror concept album with a wide progressive streak.**

furlongs wide. Dominated by enchanting, acoustic folk songs like the deliciously featherweight *Butterfly*, it retains links to Wileman's past work, but hints at a renewed effort to warp familiar tropes into something entirely fresh and new.

With instrumentation that includes accordion, bouzouki and Appalachian dulcimer, *The Forked Road* is often very pretty and very weird at the same time. *Comet Vs The Earth* is downbeat but sublime: a rustic core of acoustic guitar wrapped in what sounds like plaintive, muted brass but could just as easily be field recordings made in Avebury or actual ghosts in one of Wileman's studio machines. The song also appears to be a pivotal moment in *The Forked Road*'s overriding narrative, wherein a vast comet hits the Earth and causes a great uprising of the undead, which certainly makes a change from psychedelic folk songs about taking psychedelic drugs in the sunshine. By contrast, the ritualistic strumming and twinkling harp of *Old Bones* seem rather more intimate and bound to the natural world. A noticeably dry and deadpan vocal from Wileman is eerie and unnerving: if he put down his guitar and calmly led you to a recently constructed wicker man, you would not be at all surprised.

There are some gorgeously weird instrumental moments too: the title track is a two-minute marvel wherein ghostly guitars echo and twang over unsettling, backward tones. *Avenue And Circle* is an exercise in tense minimalism; like the soundtrack to some perverse rural ritual. *Spectres Of The Ridgeway* is as amorphous and unsettling as its title suggests. But Wileman is at his peculiar best on *Children Of The Sun* — a progged-out campfire singalong with ghostly woodwind and Moog trimmings — and *The Invisible Beast*, which blends discordant, formless scree with a dark, dramatic hymn, underpinned by pipe organ and a hint of occult menace.

Wileman has made spooky music before (Karda Estra's 2004 album *Voivode Dracula* is genuinely terrifying), but *The Forked Road* feels more vivid and tangible than many of his previous works, as it blurs the lines between windswept, weather-beaten reality and whichever nefarious, supernatural forces still lurk in the Wiltshire shadows.

DOM LAWSON

EINAR SOLBERG

The Congregation Acoustic INSIDEOUTMUSIC

Leprous frontman strips down his band's past glories.

Since the pandemic, musicians have managed to keep their audiences entertained in all kinds of unconventional ways, and Leprous frontman Einar Solberg isn't the only artist to have attempted a stripped-down, livestreamed treatment of his back catalogue. When he took to the stage in his native Norway in early 2022, however, he chose to repurpose Leprous's 2015 album *The Congregation* in its entirety.

When the pummelling bass drums and roaring vocal malevolence of tracks such as *Rewind* are reconstructed into rumbling piano and soul-searching vocal, it's a completely different proposition to the original, and Solberg's startlingly resonant falsetto becomes the star of the show, echoing the torch song dramatics of The Associates' Billy Mackenzie at times. When there are strong melodic motifs for him to wrap it around, as on *The Price* and *Lower*, it becomes something spellbinding in its own right. But elsewhere, without the peaks and troughs, riffs and rock dynamics of the original song structures, it starts to merge into one long angst-wracked cri de coeur that needs more light and shade to be effective. **JS**

BRUCE SOORD

Caught In The Hum BURNING SHED

Limited-edition live CD and DVD from The Pineapple Thief frontman.

Caught In The Hum was recorded during Bruce Soord's recent solo European tour and, while the title evokes images of badly earthed amps in dodgy clubs, these multi-track recordings have a similar sonic breadth and depth to this year's solo studio album *Luminescence*.

After the brisk acoustic *Instant Flash Of Light*, Soord introduces The Pineapple Thief's Jon Sykes on bass and backing vocals, and Tash Buxton-Lewis on drums. He enjoys a warm rapport with his audiences, joking that some find his solo material is depressing and sombre, but it's really about living life to the full.

There's a strong sense of melancholy in *All This Will Be Yours*, an apologetic address to his daughter about the mess we have created, and the poignant *Dear Life* finds Soord singing, *'Don't wish that it will all be over/In the sweetest blink of an eye.'*

These live versions animate the songs' sentiments and reinforce the sense of taking hold of destiny. There's a keen sense of dynamics, too, with Soord's guitar taking off into the stratosphere or locking into twisting lines with Sykes's bass. It culminates with lean and limber takes on TPT songs *Alone At Sea* and *Snowdrops*. **MB**

TODAY WAS YESTERDAY

Today Was Yesterday MASCOT

80s-tinged pop-prog with added Alex Lifeson.

One can only imagine the numbers in the little black book that drummer Ty Dennis and bassist Angelo Barbera possess. The pair's debut album as Today Was Yesterday not only features former Rush guitarist Alex Lifeson, but also a cameo from Robby Krieger of The Doors (Barbera and Dennis played in the latterday incarnation The Doors Of The 21st Century). *Today Was Yesterday* leans into the artier end of 80s pop. Krieger's contribution on the woozy sounding *If I Fall (Silly Games)* is suitably spaced out, slow looping guitar laid over a tune that is part Peter Gabriel (not least in Barbera's husky vocal and phrasing), part The Blue Nile. Very atmospheric.

Unsurprisingly, though, it's the six songs featuring Lifeson that are the most arresting. His ever-familiar ringing tone cuts through the choppy rhythm of *My Dog Is My God*, leading to a beautifully spiralling guitar solo to see the song out. But it's closing track *My New Low* that is the real standout, a slow build of 80s-sounding drum machine and acoustic guitar that builds towards an explosive end, with Lifeson's thrilling solo the only sound in the mix as the song fades slowly away. **PW**

TVINNA

Two - Wings Of Ember BY NORSE

Dark electro-folk songs exploring the fire of childhood.

The second instalment of a four-album narrative that ties different episodes of life with an elemental partner, here German electronic folk project Tvinna offer what predecessor *One In The Dark* unfortunately lacked.

Where *One...*, which paired birth with water, drowned listeners in massive, melancholic soundscapes, this follow-up provides far more space for the songs to breathe and flourish. *Two...* explores childhood and fire with husband and wife duo Laura and Rafael Fella beginning to make better sense of their ambitious conceptual arc.

Dawn Of Mine delivers a fizzing electronic underbelly before its mountainous chorus takes hold. *Louga* assembles its atmospheres through percussive breathing and tribal war drums, its hook shared between a lightly overdriven guitar and a bukkehorn, a traditional Norwegian instrument that possesses a striking gravity. *Irwahhên*'s suitably incendiary conclusion is fuelled by a crafty cyclical guitar riff, while its title track marries the scope of *One...* with the accessibility that underpins what is, ultimately, a far more considered and memorable album. **POW**

CHELSEA WOLFE

She Reaches Out To She Reaches Out To She LOMA VISTA RECORDINGS

Transformation and alteration filtered through varying degrees of heaviness.

That *The Liminal* appears at the halfway mark of this, Chelsea Wolfe's seventh studio album, is entirely apposite for a collection of songs that narrow their focus on the nature of change and metamorphosis. *'Did you say all you wanted to say?'* she coos over the track's haunting keyboard sweeps and insistent drums, *'Did you do all you wanted to do?'*

Wolfe isn't an artist to do anything by halves and so it proves once again with this red-raw confessional. In between meditations on new-found sobriety and the sensations this brings (*Self-Undoing*) and the fall-out of toxic relationships (*Everything Turns Blue*), Wolfe is looking forward to what the future might bring rather than being tethered to the past. Working with producer Dave Sitek and long-time collaborators Jess Gowrie (drums), multi-instrumentalist Ben Chisholm and guitarist Bryan Tulao, Wolfe has fashioned an album whose heavy sonic delivery is tempered with a mood of cautious optimism. But it doesn't bludgeon for its own sake. *Place Is In The Sun* is a penetrating affirmation of body positivity that continues the theme of surmounting life's overwhelming odds. **JM**

ZHORHANN

Ainsi Parlait Hominina LUMINOL RECORDS

When shred meets swing.

If prog, metal, fusion and jazz all went out for shots together, got drunk and then had a fight in the car park, it still wouldn't be as unpredictable and gleefully chaotic as *Ainsi Parlait Hominina*. The French instrumental trio have an admirable disregard for musical rules of engagement which rivals that of fellow genre-agnostic mavericks The Aristocrats.

When Zhorhann are heavy, they're positively crushing, with massive, doomy riffs and bludgeoning drums, but then they'll turn on a dime and start swinging. They add some funk to their metal on *Intro (Si Si...)*, while *Les Filleuls Ancestraux Part 1* is Django Reinhardt meets djent, mixing gypsy jazz guitar and gently brushed drums with slamming riff workouts. It should be thoroughly incongruous, but there's a sense of fun and freedom that's hard to resist.

Le Flamant Rose is a fusion and metal head-on collision, with squonking guitars and moments when the song collapses under the weight of its own contradictions before the trio pick up the pieces and stitch the tune back together. This is an album that's fit to burst with ideas and energy. Just try to keep up. **DW**

AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST

Grant Moon has a rummage down the back of the *Prog* sofa for the ones that nearly got away...

After their intricate and thoughtful 2020 release *Touchy Subjects*, those ever reliable Brit-proggers **The Mighty Handful** return with *Men In Stasis* (Big Ness). A collection of three recent EPs of the same name, these neo-infused songs are urgently impassioned, hookily anthemic and layered with clever musicianship (check out *The Signal III* for proof). Lead singer Matt Howes continues to grow in stature as a performer, and with every outing The Handful just get Mightier.

Cephid is the alter ego of talented Bath-based keyboardist/composer Moray Macdonald, and debut release *Sparks In The Darkness* (Broadsound) showcases his solid talent for retro-yet-progressive electronics. This is Jarre 2.0 stuff – gleaming synth lines and infectious beats beaming in from the intelligent end of the electro world. Macdonald's post-rock mindset adds heft, and Angel Wolf-Black's *Great Gig In The Sky*-type vocalisations bring a human dimension to the towering *Terminus*. Great stuff.

Highly accomplished Hungarian drummer **Oliver Zisko** has collaborated with some similarly superb instrumentalists on his latest offering, *Global Warning* (metal.hu). Allan Holdsworth bassist Anthony Crawford, ex-Dream Theater keysman Derek Sherinian and terrifyingly nimble guitarist Mike Gotthard are among those adding chops to *Carnival Of Abundance* and *Rise Up To The Mid-Alpha Level*. A highly progressive, scattergun smörgåsbord of hard fusion, drum'n'bass and electro.

Some 50 years after their self-titled debut album, Italian proggers **Acqua Fragile** reunite for the epic, old-school *Moving Fragments* (Maracash). Original trio – vocalist Bernardo Lanzetti (who fronted PFM for a while in the 70s), drummer Piero Canavera and bassist Franz Dondi are joined by a guest roster including VdGG's sax great David Jackson. Naturally, it's mellower than their early work, but only just. Lanzetti's on stage-chewing form on this beautifully recorded, richly melodic and gleefully theatrical work.

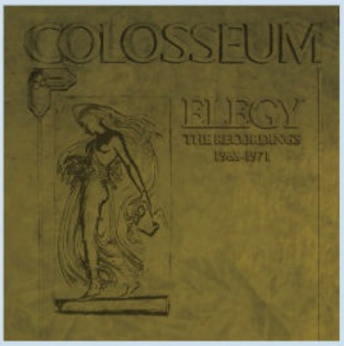
Meanwhile, in Switzerland, alt prog trio **Lagern** open their account with the highly promising *Motion* (Cold Smoke Records). With good chemistry, guitarist Pablo Lagares, keyboardist/bassist Téo Lagares and drummer Simon Prongué inhabit post-rock's fuzzier side. *Fruss* is punky and *Dionys* is almost Chili Pepper-funky, but the sweet spots are the motorik *Blauschtrift* and climactic rocker Topaze. A strong start.

Finally, *Hic Sunt Dracones* (Bitume) comes from French artist **Bruno Karnel**. His native tongue and sweetly fragile vocals lend themselves very well to the musical setting here, from moody opener *La Grise, La Triste, L'horrible* to upbeat *Mythologie Vinyle*. Cello, Mellotron, charango and the lute-like saz add sonic flavour, and Florent Morel's well-judged, organic mix brings it all together. It's an unusual and sumptuous Gallic curio.

COLOSSEUM

Elegy: The Recordings 1968-1971 ESOTERIC

Jazz prog pioneers celebrated with six-CD box.



While continuing to be revered by a devoted fanbase, Colosseum have all too often been marginalised in many accounts of progressive music's history. Founded by a bunch of forward-looking UK jazzers that included drummer Jon Hiseman and saxophonist Dick Heckstall-Smith, bassist Tony Reeves, keyboardist Dave Greenslade and singer/guitarist James Litherland, they were all busy paying their dues on the burgeoning mid-60s UK

> **Their willingness to push at the boundaries is clear.**

R&B scene. Upon seeing the direction of travel towards something distinctly heavier in tone and substance, Hiseman and colleagues quickly got on board.

Gathering together the three studio albums they released during their first period together, including *The Grass Is Greener*, a US-only hybrid of the band in transition, as well as two exuberant live performances from the era, this six-disc set ably demonstrates the momentum and energy they delivered. Their 1969 studio debut *For Those About To Die We Salute You* is a pretty good representation of what their in-concert vibe was like as they went full steam ahead with a pungent synthesis of bluesy rock filtered through their jazzy vocabulary. Though still underdeveloped as writers at this point, it nevertheless packs a decent enough punch.

However, *Valentyne Suite*, also released in 1969, is a significant leap forwards and stands as the best of the bunch. Though still partially rooted in blues, there's a greater sense of cohesion and purpose in the ambitious side-long three-part suite that gives the album its title. Hiseman would admit there was no underlying concept to the suite, but that it was simply an exercise in threading disparate ideas together. Regardless, it cemented Colosseum's reputation as a prog outfit. The first release on the then-newly established Vertigo label, its memorable Marcus Keef-designed gatefold sleeve deepened Colosseum's association with the genre, especially in retrospect, thanks to a visual language of surreal-tinged landscapes and figures that would be repeated on innumerable future Vertigo and Charisma releases.

Daughter Of Time, from 1970, captures another gear shift ushered in by significant personnel changes. Guitarist Clem Clempson, bassist Mark Clarke and vocalist Chris Farlowe's earthy roar tether things more closely to a rockier musical identity. Though Farlowe is a long way out from his 1966 hit, *Out Of Time*, his distinctive bellow occasionally lacks the nuance suggested within some of the material. Minor stylistic infractions aside, it's Colosseum's eagerness to play with the form and willingly push at the boundaries of the day that comes across loud and clear.

SID SMITH

BARCLAY JAMES HARVEST

XII CHERRY RED

Classic line-up's final fling gets audio overhaul.

Many BJH fans regard *XII* as the last hurrah of the band's classic period, not least because it was the final time their songwriting triumvirate of John Lees, Les Holroyd and Woolly Wolstenholme contributed to the same album, the latter figure taking his Mellotron home after the subsequent tour.

There will be others whose interest in the Lancastrian symphonic proggers' output was already waning as they ventured increasingly into the realm of soft rock, but on this remastered version featuring seven alternate mixes and the 5.1 surround sound treatment, the music they made on it has held up impressively well.

The same can't be said for some of the lyrics. Take *Loving Is Easy*, for instance, in which Lees offers a series of single entendres to serenade one lucky paramour, *'as I shoot all my love into you'*. Holroyd doesn't fare too much better on *Sip Of Wine* when he implores a potential partner to *'Take a sip of my wine, it's gonna make you feel fine.'* Nonetheless, the tunes are simple and infectious, and elsewhere each writer contributes sublime ballads in the shape of Woolly's *Harbour*, Holroyd's *Berlin* and Lees's *Nova Lepidoptera*, all of which sound considerably richer for the new mixes.

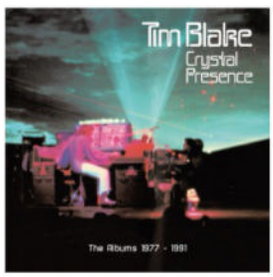
Elsewhere Lees's chosen subject matter is simply of its time. *Fact: The Closed Shop* takes aim at an unpopular trade union practice of the era, and despite the likeably celtic-laced accompaniment, you can imagine how welcome a wealthy rock star's lecture was to working folk as he announced his disapproval *'until they strike for what is right, not what has been.'* Then to close, *Fiction: The Streets Of San Francisco* borrows the title of a popular TV show of the time to relate the tale of a scorned woman turned serial killer taking her revenge on mankind. Again, though – a real beauty of a song is if the 21st-century listener can suspend their sexual politics for six minutes.

A snapshot of different times, then, and one that often still looks good, warts and all. **JS**

TIM BLAKE

Crystal Presence - The Albums 1977-1991 ESOTERIC

Psych-rock mainstay's space-synth masterworks.



Known principally for his work as part of both Gong and Hawkwind, Tim Blake cuts a curious figure as a solo artist. Neither entirely prog or electronica, the multi-instrumentalist was, nonetheless, responsible for two of the most underrated synthesiser-led albums of the late 70s.

After Gong's 1975 implosion, Blake returned to France, where he'd lived for the previous four years. He founded Crystal Machine with lighting and sound designer Patrice Warrener as an audio visual feast, playing the Seasalter Free Festival in Kent in late summer 1976, presumably sounding like they must have come from another planet. One track recorded there, *Last Ride Of The Boogie Child*, appeared on Blake's 1977 debut solo album, also called *Crystal Machine*, a collection of tracks and live recordings that sounds ahead of its time – *Metro/Logic*, for example, sounds like something Eno & Byrne would produce a few years later.

The follow-up, 1978's *Blake's New Jerusalem* – a title suggested by Glastonbury founder Sir Michael Eavis – is his masterpiece. Intended to be instrumental, lyrics came to Blake and the album begins with his delicate voice singing *Song For A New Age* accompanied by acoustic guitar. It's soon back to synths: on *Lighthouse*, Blake intones a captain's log, out on a search for where crystal people dwell; the meaty, beaty *Generator* practically invents Underworld. The side-long title track is rich with warmth and melody, belying the fact that synthesisers can only be glacial.

The third album in this box set, *Magick*, was recorded in a night in Blake's windmill in Brittany in 1991. It reflects how technology had moved on – just because the keyboard offers handclaps, it doesn't mean they have to be used – and has dated less well than his 70s work. *A Magick Circle* and *Return To Clouds* are classic Blake, and *Tonight* sounds like the product of a broken heart and several bottles of red, but it's the lesser of the three albums here. **DE**

GANDALF'S FIST

Songs From The Solway EP NIGHTKEEPER PRODUCTIONS

Cumbrian storytellers' 2011 outing revisited.

Most acts offering a set of eight tracks running to around 34 minutes of music would proudly label it an album, but prog bands do things differently. Particularly Gandalf's Fist, who have been known to make LPs to occupy over three hours of anyone's listening attention. So this 2011 self-release was labelled an EP, but here it has been repackaged, remixed and remastered, and it still offers a sizable chunk of entertainment for your prog dollar.

Gandalf's Fist mainman Dean Marsh has explained that it's a "diverse" set of tunes informed by folk tales from the band's home county of Cumbria. There is, however, a distinct maritime thread running throughout, with many set on and around The Solway Firth on Cumbria's Scottish border. That materialises boldly in the sea shanty-ish chord progressions and portentous mob vocal shoutalong accompaniment of *The Betsy Jane* (telling the tall tale of a ghost ship) and *Stakes At Low Tide*'s startling tale of a serpent slithering out of the sandbanks, which turns into a dragon and feasts on local children, recounted with no little relish by early vocalist Beccie Watson.

The standout track, however, relocates us to the sunnier climes of the Caribbean to hear the confessions of *The Regency Rascal*, drawing on the centuries-old legend of buccaneer Sam Lord, who was said to lure sailors to their doom on the rocks of Barbados. It draws on sounds ranging from steel drums to icy synths and a compelling twin guitar riff within the same riotous passages as Watson insists, *'I am the darkness, I am the light, I am the ships that pass in the night.'* From there it builds into a fair old romp full of galloping Iron Maiden-style thunder and fret hysteria from Marsh. Just the thing to soundtrack the average shipwreck.

The 'Fist would go on to expand their horizons into more ambitious song-cycles after this early release, but this is a welcome reissue of an assured step on their singular creative journey. **JS**

HIGH TIDE

Sea Shanties ESOTERIC

Remastered vinyl gatefold reissue of psych/prog underground classic.

Released at the end of 1969, the title of High Tide's debut, *Sea Shanties*, might suggest a pleasant collection of yo-ho-hoing sailor's songs – but instead, it's an apocalyptic blast of heavy psych, proto-prog and classical folk that encapsulates the darkness and weirdness of the decade to come. Formed by guitarist Tony Hill, formerly of garage rock mavericks The Misunderstood, one of the defining aspects of High Tide's unique sound was the gibbering banshee wail of Simon House's electric violin. House would go on to play with Hawkwind – one of the reasons *Sea Shanties* subsequently became highly collectable – but the sonic attack he creates here is equal to anything he did with the space rock overlords.

Futilist's Lament is an astonishing opening track. It begins with a riff that's so heavy, it sounds like Hill's guitar is grinding rocks, before House piles on an additional layer of distortion – the only band that even approached this level of evil noise at the time were the Stooges. The song itself is swooning and mysterious, buffeted on all sides by aural mayhem, but kept on course by Hill's elegant baritone, Ladbroke Grove's very own Jim Morrison. It's a vision of the Altamont/Manson generation, the 60s *'vomiting her lies of truth'*, a punk bonfire of hippie vanities.

The instrumental *Death Warmed Up* features another brain-pummelling riff full of gothic dread – House has pitched up in 18th-century Germany with a Marshall stack, while Hill's experiments in six-string overload go to places even Hendrix feared to tread. *Pushed, But Not Forgotten* is a gentle lullaby that anticipates King Crimson at their mellowest, punctuated by outbursts of rampaging psych; *Walking Down Their Outlook* is a disquieting mix of melodic folk rock and baroque riffage; *Missing Out* is a fast, howling blues.

The remastered sound is crisp, with improved separation between the instruments, but retains the album's gloomy charm. And the restored artwork, by a pre-VdGG/Genesis Paul Whitehead, looks wonderful. **JB**

IQ

The Wake GEP

Long-awaited vinyl release of British neo-proggers' pivotal second LP.

Following their striking, enthusiastic yet occasionally musically naïve debut *Tales From The Lush Attic*, IQ approached their second album with an apparently different mindset. Written, recorded and released within a six-month period in 1985, it found them drawing on greater facility and musical maturity developed through frequent gigging, and production duties were undertaken by guitarist Mike Holmes and bassist Tim Esau. Simultaneously, inter-band tensions had grown, with frontman Peter Nicholls especially feeling uncomfortable and disconnected.

> **An album of discomforting themes and dark power.**

While not strictly a concept album, *The Wake* is based very loosely on death and the main protagonist's experience of it and what comes after. All these factors coalesced in an album of discomforting themes and dark power. Opener *The Outer Limits* builds tension via over a minute of a repeated sullen bass and bass drum figure before the band kick in with a morose urgency. The title track is a relatively short proggy swagger and the band go full neo-prog on *The Magic Roundabout*, the multifaceted fan favourite *Widow's Peak* and album closer *Headlong*. Despite its evocative use of sitar guitar, *Corners* feels both out of place and rather dated with its continuous drum machine loop and a song that doesn't really get going, overstaying its welcome by at least two minutes. Meanwhile, demonstrating that the band weren't merely aping prog contemporaries, much of *The Thousand Days* could pass as a bouncy early offering from The Cure.

The sound of *The Wake* owes much to both keyboardist Martin Orford and Holmes. Orford's liberal use of parping 80s polysynth sounds and a recently acquired Mellotron, heard throughout the album but particularly noticeable on *The Outer Limits* and *Widow's Peak*, provide texture and drama. Holmes's scintillating guitar interventions in *The Wake*, channelling Hackett in *The Magic Roundabout* and at the atmospheric start of the glorious middle-section of *Widow's Peak*, and the jangling chord work in *The Thousand Days* all help to stretch the sonic palette.

Presented on lurid marbled green vinyl with a gatefold sleeve bearing Peter Nicholls's original cover art (based on an image from the film *Quest For Fire* rather than a photo of himself, despite what some fans and bandmates suspected at the time), this is the first time since its initial release that the album has been available on vinyl and it uses the same remastered source as *The Wake*'s 2010 CD box set. Although perhaps not the masterpiece some fans would claim, it was an important album, establishing a sound and direction that IQ have refined over the subsequent three decades.

GARY MACKENZIE

THE EPIC SAGA OF THE BAND THAT CHANGED PROG

Featuring exclusive interviews with some of the band's main protagonists alongside a look back at their key albums – from *Nursery Cryme* to *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway* – this is a must-have for all Genesis fans

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ANTHONY PHILLIPS & HARRY WILLIAMSON

Gypsy Suite ESOTERIC

Remastered and expanded set from the former Genesis guitarist.

Haunting and majestic, sonorous and plaintive, this bumper set bundles together Anthony Phillips and Harry Williamson's 1995 album *Gypsy Suite* along with demos for their earlier collaboration *Tarka*.

Phillips and Williamson – whose father, Henry Williamson, wrote the children's book *Tarka The Otter* – first started sketching ideas for these songs in the summer of 1971, but it wouldn't be until four years later that they'd knuckle down and start creating the music that would eventually become *Gypsy Suite*. Its four movements may stretch back to the mid-70s, but the purity of the music and its delivery has made these pieces almost timeless. Phillips is instantly recognisable, all detuned guitars and intricately detailed melodies – his playing on *Movement II: Siesta* is so stirring and warm that it's all you can do to drop everything and wonder why you're suddenly weeping. He and Williamson do evocative very well, conjuring up aural colours and shapes that transport the mind. And inevitably, there are moments when, this being Phillips at his showboating 70s best, it feels like we're waiting for a break in the music to usher in Peter Gabriel's vocals, so familiar is the guitarist phrasing and tone, though never to the detriment of the songs themselves.

This reissue also features the demos for Phillips and Williamson's rejected score for the 1974 movie *Tarka The Otter*, which was eventually completed and released in 1988. It's completed by the unreleased *Movement III: The Hunt* – a rousing, revolving piano piece that sounds as though it should be the accompanying soundtrack to a dark and complex murder mystery.

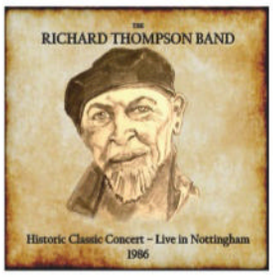
It's strange to think now that they struggled to find a label to release the original album, though the duo did turn down a deal with a Virgin imprint that offered them a multitrack tape recorder in lieu of an advance payment. No matter, these songs have transcended the years, shining as brightly and bold now as they ever did. **PW**

THE RICHARD THOMPSON BAND

Historic Classic Concert - Live In Nottingham 1986

STORE FOR MUSIC

Folk-rock avatar in blazing mid-80s form.



Richard Thompson was in a peculiar place by the middle of the 80s. Viewed in the main as some old folkie, he actually had far more in common with Elvis Costello and Joe Jackson, angry men on a following wave, than anything unearthed by Cecil Sharp. His ability to shred away was a significant part of Thompson's stylistic toolkit and this wild, untrammelled side of his arsenal is in great evidence on *Historic Classic Concert*, recorded as a radio concert at Nottingham's Rock City in 1986, shortly after the release of the *Daring Adventures* album.

The opening attack of *Fire In The Engine Room* bursts out like the angriest pre-punk pub rock, and that's where the majority of the show remains. Christine Collister – she and musical partner Clive Gregson, of the folk duo Gregson & Collister, were Thompson's regular backing vocalists at this point – sings Linda Thompson's parts beautifully throughout, especially on the redoubtable *Wall Of Death*.

A cover of Sandy Denny's *John The Gun* is the furthest Thompson strays into the older parts of his work, and 1974's *Withered And Died*, then recently revived by Elvis Costello himself, is performed solo with his electric.

Thompson's musical boundary-pushing is sweetly offset by his self-effacing inter-song banter. "I don't know what to say... welcome to Nottingham," he falters after the thrashing ending of *Shoot Out The Lights*. Elsewhere, he quips, "Here's something to take you to the pits of existence," in the intro to *Did She Jump Or Was She Pushed?*

This concert has appeared in several official and unofficial forms over the years, but this is the first to feature the Collister and Gregson songs (*Warm Love Gone Cold* and *Summer Rain*, respectively) from the set. In many respects, with the two of them sharing the vocals with Thompson, *Historic Classic Concert* is a slicker, noisier 1980s update of Fairport Convention. **DE**

PROCOL HARUM

Shine On Brightly ESOTERIC

Divisive second album reissued on vinyl.

It's curious that Robin Trower is reluctant to reminisce about his time in Procol Harum. His guitar solos and flurries on their second album, released in 1968, are frequently the elements that raise these sometimes overly earnest pieces of keyboard-led chamber rock to more exciting levels. A key track and significant offering in the development of prog was side two's 18-minute suite *In Held 'Twas In I* , which was as boldly baroque as anything

> **It documents a band deducing who they are.**

The Moody Blues or The Nice had at that point constructed. Despite its presence, however, *Shine On Brightly* perhaps hasn't aged as gracefully as, say, Procol's more varied, vibrant debut or its follow-up, 1969's *A Salty Dog*.

It's fascinating, still, because it documents a band deducing who they are as they wrap their heads around the way their blues core has been usurped by the popular success of monumental, stately yet trippy hits such as *A Whiter Shade Of Pale* and *Homburg*. It feels here as if they're keen to avoid being typecast as a generation's alternative balladeers and want to prove they're a 'serious' rock band, but don't have the tools or physique to be a conventional one. Which is why Trower's dazzling licks and tricks seem to burst in from another room, almost bolted on to a sound which, with Gary Brooker and Keith Reid working as a more stoned Elton and Bernie, is at heart meditative and song-based.

Generally, Brooker croons Reid's poetry-on-acid lyrics convincingly, but now and again he sounds as uncomfortable as any right-thinking person would be with *'My eunuch friend has been and gone/He said that I must soldier on'* or, *'At a time like this, which exists maybe only for me, but is nonetheless real...'* Soon after this, as that 18-minute suite settles in, the Dalai Lama tells the narrator, *'"Well, my son, life is like a beanstalk, isn't it?"'* Such floridness is enough to bring on cravings for the light fandango, or argue that Jon Anderson's away-with-the-faeries lyrics on *Close To The Edge* made common sense by comparison. Bar some ill-advised spurts of fairground music, most of the first side's songs are solid if unspectacular, so the record's reputation stands or falls on the courage or madness of its second half's bold yet elegant curveball, *In Held 'Twas I*.

The album was officially produced by Denny Cordell, but the band have said it was actually Glyn Johns and young Tony Visconti who helped them assemble this work, chopping and editing as they went along. For all that Reid's lyrics are distracting — has anyone ever deployed *"twas'* so much? — the musicianship and maverick energy keep it afloat. *Shine On Brightly* still flickers valiantly.

CHRIS ROBERTS

Take a bow

Neil Durant: in the zone.

Peter Nicholls: in excellent form.

IQ

VENUE	O2 ACADEMY ISLINGTON, LONDON
DATE	08/12/2023

It's bitterly cold outside tonight as IQ take the stage for yet another 'Legendary Christmas Bash', and to be honest, the atmosphere seems a bit frosty inside Islington Academy too. Downgrading from the far more suitable Islington Assembly Hall (where the band played in 2019) or 229 in Great Portland Street, probably hasn't helped matters as it's rammed to the rafters inside this soulless concrete box of a venue and sharpened elbows are pointing rigidly outward. There's little in the way of Christmas cheer for anyone trying to manoeuvre their way towards the stage.

At the bar, one fellow of short stature is even getting belligerent with punters standing in front of him ordering a drink, seemingly oblivious to the fact that's actually what happens at bars in venues. Later, he and his coterie of pals will be admonished, rightly, for yapping like terriers. There's been a fair few posts on social media about behaviour at gigs recently, and not just from the prog community. Is this a reflection of where we're at as a society?

Thankfully, IQ bring plenty of seasonal spirit of goodwill with them, as Prokofiev's *Troika* rings out. Cheers abound as the band plunge straight into *Awake And Nervous*, followed by *Subterranea*, as impressive an opening couplet as any IQ fan could hope for. Better still, they offer the first of two new songs, this one with the working title of *Malagonia*. Later, we'll get a second working title, *Plinth*, with the most welcome news that, yes, there will be a new IQ studio album in 2024. It'll be the band's first in five years (the last being 2019's *Resistance*), in keeping with the timeframe they've adhered to since the release of 2004's *Dark Matter*.

Despite the smaller stage, IQ make the whole show look effortless. Each bandmember excels at their instrument of choice and coalesces into a brilliantly tight unit as they weave their way through *Widow's Peak* and *The Magic Roundabout*. The latter's parent album, *The Wake*, is to be the first of a coloured vinyl reissues programme that the band recently announced. Peter Nicholls says that they had hoped to have copies in time to sell at the show but, in time-honoured IQ style, that hasn't happened. Those with long memories, which probably includes the bulk of tonight's audience, will recall 1983's debut, *Tales From The Lush Attic*, being on sale at gigs without the cover, after the band discovered the fee they'd paid to get the record pressed didn't include the artwork!

> **"For more than 40 years now IQ have been wowing fans in venues around the world, and on tonight's showing, they're better than ever."**

Shifting into an even higher gear, IQ finish the set proper with three real belters: *Leap Of Faith* from *Ever*, a dark and ominous title track from *The Road Of Bones* and the epic *Harvest Of Souls* from *Dark Matter*. It's a thrilling conclusion to what's been a brilliantly delivered set, showing the full range of the band's musicality, Nicholls in particular in excellent form. Needless to say, the roar that goes up at the conclusion damn near raises the roof.

The band reappear to even more cheers, while we await the moment that has become the highlight of these seasonal shows: Mike Holmes with an enormous pair of angel's wings! Islington is not left disappointed, even if it's clear the change in venue is posing Holmes and crew some significant logistical issues getting onstage. Thank God, then, for the announcement the band will be back at the Assembly Hall for 2024's show,

For the encore, we get an epic-sounding *Frequency*, which ups the now celebratory mood pervading the venue, before the oh-so-familiar strains of *The Last Human Gateway*'s middle section brings the night to a close in spectacular fashion. It seems to have thawed even the hardiest humbugger from earlier in the evening.

For more than 40 years now IQ have been wowing fans in venues around the world, and on tonight's showing, they're better than ever. In last issue's 80s prog cover story, we asked: what was success? Having a hit album? Or a career that lasts this long and shows no signs of abating? *Prog* knows what we'd go with.

JERRY EWING

A heavenly Holmes ups the *Frequency*.

MIKE WITH WINGS: REJEAN ALLARD. ALL OTHER PHOTOS: KEVIN MIXON

Mike Holmes: no *Resistance* here!
Still wowing fans after all these years.
Spreading Christmas cheer for all to hear!
We might have to wait ages for albums, but IQ certainly know how to put on a show!

GEDDY LEE'S MY EFFIN' LIFE: IN CONVERSATION

VENUE	PORTSMOUTH GUILDHALL, PORTSMOUTH
DATE	17/12/2023

In 2019, with his *Big Book Of Bass* tour, Geddy Lee did the 'cosier' shop events and occasional interview dates, with signings in places such as Waterstones and Barnes & Noble. But promotion for Lee's first biography *My Effin' Life* would always be on a greater scale due to the subject matter and the fanbase, and an initial 14 dates in the US and Canada saw the Rush frontdude visiting 2,000-3,000 capacity venues built for rock.

Hopping over to the UK, Lee's *Effin'* schedule continues as shows in rock venues are set up as two hour-long halves, the first as an interview by a surprise celeb fan – so far, Nicky Wire, Melissa Auf Der Maur, Joe Elliott, Phill Jupitus – the second answering audience questions, entertainingly moderated by wingman (and *Prog* writer) Philip Wilding.

It's been thrilling stuff with Geddy impressing as an engaging and natural raconteur, whether in conversation or reading book snippets from his lectern. But nothing could have prepared the Portsmouth audience, on a sleepy Sunday, for the celeb-host appearance of best friend and bandmate Alex Lifeson, who strolls out to a sea of dropped jaws before everyone rises to their feet and cheers, finally taking in the clue of 'My Effin' Lifeson', which flashes up on the back screen. It's topped only by Alex asking the audience "Shall we get Geddy out?" and Lee peeping around a curtain, stage left, to a rousing welcome.

Sitting in armchairs within a living room set-up of lamps, shelves, framed photos and copies of Geddy's book, Dirk and Lerxst briefly revert to giggling, awkward teenagers before settling in for what becomes a fairly intimate discussion of their friendship and three stages of Rush. There's the beginning, with memories of John Rutsey and just *how* many joints were smoked while touring and making music. The middle period *has* to feature Neil/Pratt (Alex noticing Neil's "short, uncool" hair at his audition, which was nearly a dealbreaker; memories of success and recording in the UK – and how punk actually galvanised the band's raison d'être). By 'the end', the pair recall Neil's tragic personal losses with the band ceasing in support of him, and then coming together for their final act – and the shocking and heartbreaking farewell to their drum king.

Offsetting tragedy, there's comedy. Geddy can't resist embarrassing Alex by reading out an extract detailing an episode of cognac-fuelled havoc from a night in Manchester. Geddy grins, looking over at his cringing companion. It's a rare chance for the public to see their longstanding bond close-up and it's really quite a beautiful thing.

What an effin' life, what an effin' band – what an effin' friendship.

JO KENDALL

PROG THE FOREST

VENUE	THE FIDDLER'S ELBOW, LONDON
DATE	03/12/2023

It's a both bitterly cold and rain-sodden, not to mention heartsinkingly grey, December Sunday — the kind tailor-made for spending the day lazing on the sofa, central heating on and watching movies. But there's a very healthy queue of expectant prog fans doing their best to shelter from the unstinting drizzle, stretching down the road from the Fiddler's Elbow doorway. It's this writer's first time at the charity event and it's an absolute delight to attend. Even though the day has been blighted by the last-minute withdrawals from both The Blackheart Orchestra and This Winter Machine, Kindred Spirit Band and Storm Deva have been seemingly effortlessly shoehorned into the bill, although *Prog* is sure there was a bit more consternation behind the scenes than seems apparent on the face of things.

There doesn't seem to be much in the way of rhyme and reason to the order of the billing. **EBB** open proceedings, for example, despite clearly being a band with a major buzz around them at the moment, and certainly worth more than an opening slot might suggest. Kicking off with the energetic *Revenge Of The Fifth*, the sextet turn in a set worthy of a headline act. They debut a new song, *Cost & Consequence*, from their new *The Management Of Consequences* EP, which sounds great, and they ooze a confidence befitting of a band who one could say have had a pretty good year.

Kindred Spirit Band are up next. Very much from the folkier end of the prog spectrum, Elaine Samuels and co weave wonderful stories from seemingly phantasmagorical realms in the most engaging of manners. Despite their last-minute addition to the bill, it's a set that warms the heart. Like KSB, it's also our first time catching **Ebony Buckle** live, too, and it's a real delight. With Buckle on keyboards backed by Nick Burns on guitar, not to mention two additional interpretive dancers, she glides through a wonderful set of baroque-type prog, Buckle's soaring vocals on the likes of *Jupiter Rising*, *The Monster* and *Disco Lasers*, the title track of the art-pop vocalist's debut album, before **Guranfoe** offer up a highly entertaining hour or so of Canterbury-inspired instrumentals that really belie the quartet's age and are most impressive.

After a short break, **Storm Deva**, a very late addition to cover for the ailing Blackheart Orchestra, lead us through a short set of material from their brand-new, self-titled debut album. The duo — Carollyn Eden on vocal and keyboards and prog-rocking astrophysicist Dr Stu Clarke on guitar — deliver a set that's melodic, emotive and very good. *Prog* looks

Kindred Spirit Band spread their vibes.

Music and science combine with Storm Deva.

> **"On a day blighted by appalling weather, Prog The Forest proves to be an absolute triumph of an event."**

EBB open the day's proceedings with style.

Hats Off Gentlemen It's Adequate are joined by Tree Stewart to round off a superb evening.

JIM DONNELLY

Gliding vocals: Ebony Buckle.

forward to seeing what they do when they perform with a bigger live band.

Which leaves us with co-hosts of the event, **Hats Off Gentlemen It's Adequate**, who indulge in a varied set of originals and covers. They open with *By The Water*, from the band's very first album, 2012's *Invisible*, and which features Malcolm Galloway's wife Kathryn on flute, and include takes on Radiohead's *Creep* and Dylan's *Knocking On Heaven's Door*. Later on, Galloway alone at the keyboards leads a rapt audience through Marillion's *Warm Wet Circles*, before HOGIA partner Mark Gatland returns for a more traditional live set from the pair, if anything the duo could be described as traditional!

The roars of approval that greet the climax of *All Empires Fall* is testament to the unique allure of the event. On a day blighted by appalling weather and beset with all manner of public transport issues, not to mention those last-minute withdrawals, the fifth Prog The Forest proves to be an absolute triumph of an event. It's a fact more than illuminated by the announcement, a week or so later, that it's raised over £2,000 for the World Land Trust, which equates to the charity being able to purchase and protect 21 acres of threatened habitat. Hats off, indeed then, to Prog The Forest. We're looking forward to next year already.

JERRY EWING

Guranfoe add some energy.

GREEN LUNG

VENUE	ELECTRIC BALLROOM, LONDON
DATE	10/12/2023
SUPPORT	WYTCH HAZEL

Fans trying to buy last-minute tickets are told that tonight's show has sold out. This is the retro rockers' largest hometown gig yet and they've made a big impact in just a short time, having only formed in 2017. Their sound conjures up plenty of images of the 70s heyday of Deep Purple, Atomic Rooster and Blue Öyster Cult.

First up, however, and dressed to impress in matching all-white outfits and guitars, Lancaster's **Wytch Hazel** take to the stage. They aren't messing about, either, diving straight into a set filled with Thin Lizzy-like dual guitar harmony lines. They play tracks from their two more recent albums, *Pentecost* and *Sacrament*, with lyrical themes depicting vivid stories between Satan and God. It's a spookily fun affair.

An impressively giant statue of a Dorset Ooser, a carved wooden head from 19th-century folklore, takes centre-stage ahead of **Green Lung**'s arrival. They open with *The Forest Church*, from latest album *This Heathen Land*, John Wright's crisp organ-playing immediately apparent as the song rips through the Camden venue.

After a few heavier tracks Green Lung change instruments, with Joseph Ghast swapping out bass for a tom, and Scott Black trading electric guitar for acoustic. Off they go to the softer acoustic *Song Of The Stones*, which carries the same grit even without the distortion.

"Tories and landlords leave the house, this is *Hunters In The Sky*," announces singer Tom Templar. Riffs resume, and the mosh pit scales up.

The intro for *One For Sorrow* is anatomically filthy in every form. Coming at a slightly slower tempo, the breakdown hits harder with twinkles of synth arpeggio interplaying with guitar.

It would be criminal not to mention Ghast's backing vocals and thundering bass-playing. He knows exactly where to hit the fretboard for the most effective impact, while keeping the groove going through every track. With each song that goes by, the energy of the room builds and builds with riffs layering up on top of each other like some sort of heavy metal lasagne – each bite more scrumptious than the last.

Given this is the band's last concert of 2023, the crowd chants escalate to the usual dance for an encore. And Green Lung certainly aren't done with the audience just yet. They finish with *Let The Devil In* and *Graveyard Sun*, and the sea of crowd-surfers flows over the barrier alongside Templar, who jumps into the audience during one last gnarly guitar solo from Black.

Green Lung know how to put on a show that leaves audiences energised, and six years in, it seems we're only at the start of the band realising their full potential.

GRACE HAYHURST

LAZULI

VENUE	ELECTRIC BANANA, WESTON-SUPER-MARE
DATE	03/12/2023
SUPPORT	ALSO EDEN

A venue the size of a squash court down an alley beside a rain-lashed Bristol Channel wraps up the French proggers' week-long UK visit. Tonight's all about reuniting with old friends, Stephen Lambe and Huw Lloyd-Jones, organisers of Summer's End where Lazuli made their UK debut in 2011.

Also Eden open with a brief, well-measured set, Ian Hodson's lightning keyboards firing up the intricate, pacey *Between The Lines*. New song *Scented Candle Corridors* has the hallmarks of another characteristic, atmospheric slow-burner. Animated new drummer Guy Monk is a revelation, most notably delivering the sombre military rhythms on *A Widow's Eyes'*, while Lloyd-Jones's commanding voice is in fine fettle.

Lazuli begin with a crackle of vinyl that starts *Sillonner Des Océans De Vinyles*, the ensuing trip around their unique musical universe featuring nine songs from latest studio album *11*. The fullness and depth of their multilayered sound translates spectacularly live, together with the infectious fraternal joy and energy they endlessly radiate.

Claude Leonetti conjures up the swirling atmospherics with his modular magic wand, the Léode, while guitarist/bassist Arnaud Beyney, brings both sonic and sartorial elegance to the party. Dominique Leonetti's remarkable clear voice serves as an instrument that transcends language; that crystalline instrument soars ever skywards on the heart-felt *Le Pleureur Sous La Pluie*.

In halting English he explains the tale behind *La Bétaillère*, which relates to a childhood car journey passing a cattle truck. The animals' fear is expressed through the shrill combination of Léode and Romain Thorel's French horn.

Lazuli's back catalogue is represented by, among others, extracts from *Le Fantastique Envol De Dieter Böhm* and the foot-stomping *Déraille*. They demonstrate how they can all turn up the intensity with some seriously heavy-duty rock idioms.

Les Courants Ascendants rounds off the main set, Beyney stepping up again with soulful, fluent guitar lines. The front line disappears to allow Thorel on keys and drummer Vincent Barnavol to continue improvising the song's melody line, introducing funk, classical and jazz.

Folkish, acoustic *Les Mots Désuets* sees the four non-singers providing backing vocals. Brought up on The Beatles, they seamlessly weave *Eleanor Rigby* and *Here Comes The Sun* into traditional showstopping closer, *Nine Hands Around A Marimba*.

Why, with such a live wow factor, are Lazuli still playing small venues instead of larger halls, where their sound and vision show would really reverberate? Whatever the size of the venue, they will return, their boundless enthusiasm and inherent vibrancy undimmed.

ALISON REIJMAN

DAMIAN WILSON & ADAM WAKEMAN

VENUE	PIANO SMITHFIELD, LONDON
DATE	12/01/2024

Wakeman and Wilson: big personalities, tiny stage.

What happens when you take most of it away? The instrumental layers, players, smoke and mirrors that so much progressive music revels in? In the case of tonight's tour-opening set from Damian Wilson and Adam Wakeman, we're shown the heartbeat of a rich collective CV. The stories (by turns funny, silly and heartbreaking) that shape these musical compatriots and old friends, set to an immaculately balanced palette of voice, acoustic guitar and piano. It's perhaps the closest we get to really seeing them, as people.

"Thank you so much for coming!" Wilson exclaims as he bounds into the queue at the door, greeting old friends and fans with the energy of a leading West End performer.

A few minutes later we meet Wakeman in a cupboard. Not figuratively. Not in some kind of skit. The tall, piano-playing half of tonight's duo is *literally* squashed into a coat cupboard at the back of the bar, remembering their first gig together... at Wembley Arena...

Not that either of them are complaining. Piano Smithfield is one of the capital's newest subterranean dives, and what it lacks in size it makes up for in chandeliers, cocktails and a steady flow of pizzas. It's an ideal environment for tonight's blend of first-class banter, jokes and moments of quietly profound truth, all of it framed in gorgeous songs. More like a family gathering than a concert.

"Look, it's Adam Wakeman!" Wilson beams after stirring, sun-kissed opener *When I Leave This Land*. "I *love* being with Adam Wakeman!"

"It's been too long, Mr Wilson," his partner-in-crime grins back.

It couldn't be further from their other jobs. The prog metal of Headspace and Threshold. The maximalist multiverses of Star One and Ayreon. The classic rock of Ozzy Osbourne, Black Sabbath and Deep Purple. The pomp and keyboard wizardry of Wakeman's dad. Arena. Landmarq. Iron Maiden (almost). Jazz Sabbath. *Les Miserables*...

> **"You couldn't wish for a more cathartic night out."**

And yet you can feel the DNA of some of those things. It's there in the melodies. It's there in Wakeman's soft, jazz-inflected piano lines that come out through his fingers like water. And it's there in Wilson's powers as a performer, his experience with musical theatre and high-concept characters channelled into deeply intimate, personal pieces.

Damian Wilson, loving the intimate performance.

WILL IRELAND

Wakeman, out of the broom closet!

Wilson, the man with a van.

Their new album, *Can We Leave The Light On Longer?*, came out today, so a healthy chunk of the set is devoted to that. There's the bright lilt of *Multiplicity* and the bittersweet *Hero*. *Addlestone* could have been trite in less skilled hands, with its folky tales of bare-backed horse riding through fields, but here it's an elegant pastoral swirl of Genesis-meets-Cat Stevens light, shade and feeling.

"You're all our friends here!" Wilson declares, "though I think Adam is a better friend than me."

"Mate, you've got a van," Wakeman deadpans, not missing a beat. "You're the best friend anyone could have."

There's a lot of this. Between-song nattering sees them contemplate social media, artificial intelligence, Strawbs drummer Richard Hudson (in the audience tonight) and the terrible things Wakeman and his builder brother, Oscar, have done to each other in the name of sibling pranks (let's just say the latter filled the former's car with the contents of a skip, and things escalated from there). There's a sustained battle with a cassette player, walk-on logistics, a Rick Wakeman 'Greatest Hits' tape. They feel like people you'd actively want to go to the pub with.

All of which makes the poignant moments hit so much harder. Wilson's memories of his mother's funeral. Wakeman's solo *The Man From The Island* (hilarious one moment, quietly tragic the next). *I Won't Blame Life* sees Wilson come into the audience, seemingly for another joke, until he starts singing as if he might break, without a mic. Things we all fear about life, time and mortality.

They close on an upper with a singalong *Homegrown*, as final cocktails are shaken and everyone feels like a friend. You couldn't wish for a more cathartic night out.

POLLY GLASS

dam Wakeman has ecs appeal.

MESHUGGAH

VENUE	MGM MUSIC HALL AT FENWAY, BOSTON, MA, USA
DATE	09/12/2023

There are plenty who would argue against Meshuggah belonging in the pages of *Prog*. Their audial wall of metal and rage makes them pretty much impenetrable to those who prefer Soft Machine to Slayer. However, beneath the brutality, the Umeå behemoth have been rewriting the script for heavy, experimental music for nearly 30 years.

Since 1995's landmark *Destroy Erase Improve*, Meshuggah have contrasted cathartic aggression against wondrous technicality. Drummer Tomas Haake pulls off inhuman polyrhythms while maintaining a simple, heavy backbeat that metalheads can go apeshit to, and guitarists Mårten Hagström and Fredrik Thordendal pioneered their instrument's push into eight strings.

The 20-limbed extreme machine reaffirm their progressive prowess as they headline a packed-out MGM Music Hall in Boston. *Broken Cog* – the opening track of Meshuggah's 2022 album, *Immutable* – commences the night in a foray of avant-garde drum beats. After Hagström and Thordendal keep up with their barraging, open-string chugs, singer Jens Kidman rises from breathy whispers to all-out roars. It's a creeping and diverse induction into the band's soundscape, immediately shattered by *Rational Gaze* bursting from the speakers like an uncaged predator.

All the while, Meshuggah's impeccable light show keeps up with every single note. Given this is a band that play a lot of notes, it's a spectacle that's among the most dazzling in all of live music. The impact is amplified by a stage set-up that subtly changes as the show progresses. Each bandmember initially stands in front of a mini-backdrop that bathes them in white light, with the props later being replaced by towering spotlights and new, colourful curtains hanging behind Haake.

That evolution reflects how the band's songs proceed. The gargantuan two-parter *In Death – Is Life/In Death – Is Death* fills its 15 minutes with gradually convulsing riffs, finding new ways to get the Massachusetts masses leaping over the barrier up front. During *The Abysmal Eye*, Thordendal introduces melody during an otherwise brutish tech-metal banger, cascading chords on top of Hagström, Haake and bassist Dick Lövgren's jagged rhythm attacks.

Then, during the encore, *Bleed* strikes. Although Meshuggah's biggest song has been omitted from their setlist for four years, it reclaims its place in a rampage of seemingly impossible drums and twitching guitars. Its complexity clashes with the more direct blasts of finale *Demiurge* to summarise everything excellent about this band: mind-boggling talent alongside lashings of blunt-force sonic trauma. You can deem Meshuggah "too heavy" all you want, but to rally against their place in progressive music at this point is to be wilfully ignorant.

MATT MILLS

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PRESS/ANDREA NAKHLA

JONATHAN WILSON

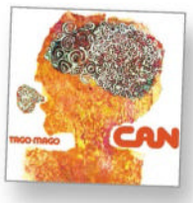
The great and good of progressive music give us a glimpse into their prog worlds. **As told to Grant Moon.**

Where's home?
I live in the wonderful area of LA called Topanga Canyon.

What's your earliest prog memory?
Growing up in North Carolina, listening to classic rock radio and hearing Rush. In my early teenage bands we used to cover *Tom Sawyer*, of course!

What was the first prog album you bought?
I was a huge Frank Zappa fan early on, so either *Hot Rats* or *Joe's Garage*. I can't remember which I had first.

And the last?



I recently scored a vinyl reissue of Can's *Tago Mago*. I've been a massive fan through the years, and love all phases of that band.

What was your first proggy gig?
Rush on their Signals tour, in Greensboro, North Carolina [March 1983]. I remember during the song *Subdivisions* that word came out of a different set of speakers around the arena. A quadraphonic aural experience – I'd never heard anything like that in my life.

And the latest?
Big Thief at the Hollywood Forever Cemetery in LA [August 2023]. They have angular and proggy moments – I really love that band.

What was the best prog gig you ever saw?
Roger Waters live at Desert Trip , Indio, California [October 2016], before I was in his band. Such a spectacle: [nearly] 80,000 fans, eight-way spatial audio. Not sure anyone has ever topped that, including Floyd.

What's your latest prog discovery?
Jim Pembroke from Wigwam. Particularly the album *Wicked Ivory*, under his moniker Hot Thumbs O'Riley. The song *Warm Rumours* is my kind of prog rock.

Any guilty musical pleasures?
I'm totally into the early 90s, cheesy world music vibe of Deep Forest. And Zappa's *Jazz From Hell* – it's almost unlistenable to some, but I love it.

Outside of music, what else are you into?
I'm a car nut, in particular early Porsche 911s. I've owned three and built one from scratch during the pandemic with a buddy. Also cooking, gardening, living that Canyon life!

What's your favourite prog venue?
The Roundhouse in London. I've played it twice. [English singer-songwriter] Bill Fay came out, it was amazing to meet him.

Who's your prog hero?
Roy Harper. Poetry, melody, his guitar playing, and the genius of songs like *Me And My Woman* or *Hallucinating Light*. My kind of prog.

What's the most important piece of prog music?
Maybe *Sea Song* by Robert Wyatt, or *Strange Stairway* by Bill Fay – they have the progressive vibrations that speak to me. Or Can's *All Gates Are Open*. There are so many!

Recommend us a good read.
Walden by Henry David Thoreau. The only book I can read again over and over.

Which prog muso would you most like to work with?

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Robert Wyatt: an incredible force of creativity.

I would be honoured to work with Robert Wyatt. I love him so much. His connection and blending of songwriting, jazz, psych is just incredible.

Which prog album that gets you in a good mood?
Clear Spot by Captain Beefheart. That's my shit!

What's your favourite prog album cover?
Gotta give it up to Pink Floyd's *Animals* for that.

And what are you up to at the moment?
I'm producing a few cool projects, finishing a new Father John Misty album, and hopefully doing some special orchestra shows around my new album, *Eat The Worm*.

See songsofjonathanwilson.com.

Car trouble? Not for Wilson, he built a Porsche 911 from scratch!

FUTURE OWNS

> I would be honoured to work with Robert Wyatt. I love him so much.

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